MR. PODD OF BORNEO

By

PETER BLUNDELL

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MR PODD OF BORNEO

CHAPTER I

MAUD ANDERBY stepped out of a taxi into Eastern life again one morning a few days after her eighteenth birthday. She stood among bags, racquets and golf clubs on Fenchurch Street platform, glancing in a friendly way at the sallow folk about her. The girls looked like tea roses. In the boat train was a rather nice old lady; and Maud's finishing school happened to have been one where the possibility of age deserving notice was still carefully inculcated. They conversed. Both, it seemed, were going to Singapore.

"It is queer to meet anyone who knows the place," remarked Maud.

"I'd hardly heard of it myself," confessed the old lady, "until my son got his cadetship and was ordered there. He's in the smoking carriage next to us now. When we get to Tilbury I'll introduce him, and he'll look after your luggage."

He did more than that. He got her a better cabin, arranged that her place at dinner in the saloon should be at the centre table, took her to see the water tanks at Aden, and managed to make her nearly lose the boat at Colombo.

They would have lost it altogether had not the captain been a friend of Alec Nixon's and father of a daughter himself.

Naturally Mrs Nixon was very upset.

"He's so careless," she apologized. "He'd lose anything."

"It was a delightful Buddhist temple," said Maud. "I wouldn't have missed it for the world."

"And the horse went lame at the wrong time," put in Alec.

"It's a habit some of them have," returned Mrs Nixon, drily. "But I've always made it a rule only to trust once a man who employs such animals. And I should advise every girl to do the same."

They did not refer to the matter again until Singapore came, and they had to say 'good-bye.'

It was then Alec said, "If we had lost that steamer we should have had another fortnight."

"I should have liked to have seen more of Ceylon," Maud had replied non-committally.

After this duly recognized beginning of a friendship, it was hardly surprising, on visiting the Templeton's bungalow outside Singapore a month later, to find Mr Alec Nixon in possession of the lawn and in the middle of a game of tennis with Mr Templeton's step-daughter, Maud Anderby.

Yet a visitor ushered out from the bungalow by the Chinese butler paused for an instant in his dignified walk, and gazed at the cadet with raised eyebrows.

"Good evening, M'Whizzle," cried Alec, cheerfully.

"Good evening," came the reply in a cold voice.

The visitor made his way with marked deliberation to where Mrs Nixon was seated with her host and hostess, and bowed gravely.

"You've met Mr M'Whizzle, of course," whispered Mrs Templeton. "Chief of the Secret Police."

The old lady shook her head.

"I've heard the name," she murmured.

"Mr Lochinvar M'Whizzle—The Honourable Mrs Nixon."

Mr Templeton made the introduction.

The visitor, a small dark man, painfully thin, bowed again silently, and looked at the tennis court with an air of marked disapproval. There was an uncomfortable pause. A certain dampness which might or might not have been the aura of a great and important official began to spread.

"I've often heard my son speak of you," began Mrs Nixon with determination.

"I am honoured," replied M'Whizzle, with a slight smile.

"Head of the Secret Police, are you not?"

"That is so," acknowledged Lochinvar M'Whizzle. He paused for a moment, and then added, with deliberation, "Unfortunately."

"Ha, ha! Very good!" laughed Mr Templeton, going red in the face at his guest's humour. "Don't believe him. He means 'unfortunately for the criminals of the country!' They are having a bad time under Mr Lochinvar M'Whizzle. I shouldn't like to be one."

The visitor frowned impatiently at the flattery.

"Not at all, not at all," he muttered. "Anyone could do as well as I."

"Oh, could they!" chuckled Mr Templeton. "Could they indeed!"

"I suppose you like your job?" inquired the old lady.

"Well—er—" Lochinvar M'Whizzle looked at the merchant uncertainly, then smiled.

"You could hardly describe such a position as the Chief of the Secret Police for all this country as a job," interposed Mrs Templeton, in an annoyed voice.

"By all means call it a job," murmured Lochinvar. "Why not, my dear Mrs Templeton, why not?"

"I certainly will not do so," declared his hostess, her rather wide, fleshy face glowing indignantly. "To be Chief of the Secret Police, with the welfare of the whole community in your keeping, is certainly far higher than a job. It's a—a——"

"A trust," suggested Mrs Nixon.

"Yes," agreed Mrs Templeton, adopting the idea in relief. "That's how I should describe it. A sacred trust."

"Well, really, when you come to think of it, I suppose it is," admitted M'Whizzle, in a thoughtful voice. "But you make my responsibilities appear greater than ever. I had never thought of it myself in that light."

"I shouldn't, if I were you," advised Mrs Nixon, acidly. "You'd find yourself in the capacity of a sacred trust a great burden."

"He never trusts anybody," growled Mr Templeton in her ear as his wife and the visitor walked across the court, where the game had now ended. "He's a most remarkable man, and Singapore is fortunate to have him. He talks six dialects, and knows the habits of every tribe in Asia. The Malays have made him

a Dato. They say that once he nearly got accepted as a Buddhist priest, but he was detected just before the ceremony, and would have been knifed but for the lucky circumstance that not one of those present had a knife. A remarkable man!"

"Unusually thin for a policeman," commented Mrs Nixon, looking over curiously at the trio by the tennis net.

"He wears himself out," explained the merchant. "A sword too keen for the scabbard. Takes no pleasure except in his work. We are about the only people he visits, and even we can't rely on him. Sometimes I've kept dinner waiting an hour, and then had a note scribbled hastily in the jungle and brought in by native messenger, saying that he is on the track of a murderer, and would I keep something hot for him? I always do. He's been quieter lately, and comes here more than ever. We're getting to look on him as one of our own."

"That's very nice," cooed the old lady. "Especially as you haven't a son."

She leaned back, and in the silence that ensued looked admiringly at the view.

On the other side of the double tennis lawn the ground shelved. Framed in bamboo and traveller palms lay the distant sea. Its colour in the mellow sunlight was deep turquoise. Behind it rose the dreaming mainland, faintly blue.

It was pleasant for Mr Lochinvar M'Whizzle, she felt, to be in process of adoption by the owner of such a view. She stiffened slightly, drew her shawl about her, and putting up a lorgnette, looked to see what her

son was doing. It did not surprise her much to find even the Chief of the Secret Police had not succeeded in frightening off Alec. Chinese 'boys,' laughing good-humouredly, were taking down the net and collecting the tennis balls. Lochinvar M'Whizzle still, in spite of himself, monopolized Mrs Templeton. Even at that distance it was apparent that, like the North Pole with the needle, he was bored at her always pointing his way. Mrs Nixon could perceive him in the act of being frigid. Looking down at her palm-leaf fan, she smiled.

The butler came and began to set out tea. The youngest couple sauntered across the lawn.

"I believe your son has grown taller since he has been on leave," remarked Mr Templeton.

"He feels taller," confessed the old lady, complacently. "Charge of a district, they say, has that effect."

"A very important district too!"

"Considering," said Mrs Nixon, with a smile, "that it contains you and me."

"It contains more than that. Half the important people in Singapore live round here. And all my racing stable."

"He ought to be bowed down with care, really," confessed Mrs Nixon.

"I've been beaten again," remarked the subject under discussion, coming up. "It's getting altogether too frequent."

"If you will persist in giving me fifteen," Maud said.

"It makes the blow less severe," returned Alec.

He went to the table, where Mrs Templeton had already taken her place, and came back with cups of tea.

"It's China," called out Mrs Templeton, as M'Whizzle refused his. . . . "You might have known," she added, with a reproachful look, "that I would not have given *you* Indian."

"But not with milk," said Lochinvar, in a reproving voice. "I never take mine with milk."

"It does seem like sacrilege," murmured Mrs Nixon.

"Exactly, I agree," said Lochinvar, with an air of approval.

"Nevertheless," said Mrs Nixon, giving a demure glance at her son, "milk for me, and two lumps of sugar. Nothing delights me more than breaking Chinese customs."

"Confucius——" began M'Whizzle.

"Except, perhaps, asking policemen the time."

"I was about to say," continued M'Whizzle, stiffly, "that Confucius certainly took his tea plain, and that all Chinese have done so for centuries. What is good enough for four hundred million Chinese is good enough for me. Even the slice of lemon that some people affect is a modern innovation introduced by the Russians. In spite of them, I still take mine plain, and shall continue to do so. . . . No, thank you: I won't have anything to eat."

"Not even one of my cakes?" asked Mrs Templeton, reproachfully. "Maud and I made them ourselves. We knew you were coming this afternoon."

"In that case," Lochinvar M'Whizzle hastened to say, with a deep bow, "my rule shall be broken."

Selecting a cake with deliberation, he smiled gratefully at mother and daughter, and took a bite. "Excellent," he pronounced. "Permit me to compliment you. No one could make a better cake, I am sure."

"Todgers can do it if it tries!" cried Mrs Templeton, triumphantly.

"Todgers' cakes," said M'Whizzle, with emphasis, "are not nearly so good as these." He gave Maud a flattering bow.

"I don't think they are, either," agreed Mrs Nixon, in an amused voice.

The puzzled Mrs Templeton looked from one to the other.

"I had some of them when I was on leave last," pursued the complimentary M'Whizzle. "They were good, yes, certainly good. But I should say not so good as these."

"Do you mean the Piccadilly Todgers?" inquired Alec, solemnly, "or the one by the Elephant and Castle?"

"The Piccadilly place, of course," replied M'Whizzle stiffly. "Er—I don't know the Elephant and Castle. I don't know that part of London."

"But I was quoting Dickens," gasped Mrs Templeton. "I didn't know there was a tea-shop in London named Todgers."

The Chief of the Secret Police glanced round him suspiciously, but the gravity of the demeanour of both Nixons was reassuring.

"My dear Mrs Templeton," he began, with an amused smile. . . . "Still it is not given to everyone to know their London. Well, if we do ever happen

to be in town at the same time, will you do me the honour of taking tea with me at Todgers, and you shall judge for yourself the quality of their confectionery."

Mrs Templeton, still looking slightly stupid, said she would.

"I hope you include me?" asked Maud, severely.

"Dear lady. I protest at any insinuation that I would dream of leaving you out."

"And me?" cried Mrs Nixon.

The Chief of the Secret Police bowed coldly.

"And me?" echoed Alec.

M'Whizzle's small black eyes flickered. "I hope," he said severely, "that our meeting in London will occur before you go on leave again."

The entrance of the butler carrying a salver, and followed closely by two dark-complexioned strangers, put an end temporarily to the conversation. Rather to everyone's surprise the card on the salver was for M'Whizzle.

He picked it up, examined it deliberately, then read aloud:

A. ARCHIBALD PODD.

Borneo. (Please see back).

The taller of the two strangers, a youth dressed in a light check linen suit, advanced, his tawny face ablaze with excitement.

"I don't mean 'see my back,'" he explained, waving a thin hand heavy with silver rings. "See the card's back, sir, that is the meaning."

"Oh," said M'Whizzle, coldly. He turned the card over.

"Relative to job of confident clerk," he read. He looked up, inquiringly.

The youth nodded.

"You're the Podd that's been writing?" asked Lochinvar M'Whizzle, eyeing him sharply.

"No other Podd but me been writing, sir," replied the coloured youth.

"How do you know that?" cross-examined M'Whizzle.

"I'm the only Podd around these parts. There are no more Podds," answered the stranger.

"I am really sorry," said M'Whizzle, turning to Mrs Templeton, "that we should be troubled just now over this affair. The fact is, I told my chuprassy," nodding at the other arrival, a white-robed Hindoo, "to let me know at once if anything important came into the office while I was away. I meant to infer messages and so on about a number of cases I am engaged on. Apparently this young Eurasian, Podd, came into the office—I have been thinking of engaging him as clerk, there has been some correspondence—and my chuprassy at once brought him over here. I am all apologies."

"Don't mention it," said Mrs Templeton.

"I have to make some such arrangement, or I could never get away from my work at all," explained the Chief of the Secret Police. "And these Indians take every order very literally. Perhaps, now the man is here, I'd better see him and get it over?"

"Do, by all means," cried Mrs Templeton. "We

could go elsewhere, and leave you the lawn if you like."

"No, no," said M'Whizzle, deprecatingly. "You will not be a bit in the way." He settled himself in his armchair, and, turning, addressed a remark in a strange tongue to the Hindoo. The man shook his head.

"That's Telegu he's speaking," whispered Mr Templeton to Mrs Nixon in an admiring voice. "I've heard the natives often in India, but I don't know a word."

"Remarkable," whispered Mrs Nixon.

M'Whizzle spoke again, and again received a monosyllabic reply. "It is just as I thought," he said in English, "the boat arrived from Borneo this morning, and the man lost no time in presenting himself. An evidence of energy in a climate like this; don't you think so, Mr Templeton?"

The merchant nodded.

"I am not presenting myself," explained the dark-complexioned young man, who had been listening to the conversation intently. "I am hiring myself out, sir."

He had come all the way from Labuan after this desirable berth, and he was anxious there should be no misunderstanding.

"Certainly," said M'Whizzle. "That's understood. . . . You speak Dyak?"

"Yes, sir, I have never had difficulty to do so."

"Then stand where you are and answer me this question," directed M'Whizzle. He sat stiffly in his armchair, his large bumpy forehead painfully corru-

gated. "*Huk ga ma li fa go honk?*" he said at last, jerkily.

"*Lai bag!*" answered the other at once, smiling.

"Isn't he wonderful?" whispered Mrs Templeton. "That's the Borneo aborigines' language. He seems quite fluent."

The old lady, impressed in spite of herself, nodded.

"How you manage to learn all those dialects I can't think," said Mrs Templeton in a despairing voice. "Even simple Malay is too much for me."

"It's just knack, and a little application," replied M'Whizzle, smiling. "After the first half-dozen of these Eastern languages the rest come easy. Dyak is a little more difficult and less known than the rest, I admit. That's why I want my confidential clerk to speak it. It will enable me to give him my orders with a fair chance of secrecy. This man speaks well. His Dyak accent is better than the average."

"I have studied the language in the Lawas River," explained the candidate for the clerkship, smiling with pleasure.

"I thought so," said M'Whizzle, looking triumphant. "You noticed the manner in which he pronounced the word *li*. A Rejang Dyak would have said '*lee.*'"

"So would a Scotch Dyak," said Mrs Nixon, solemnly.

"Got born in the Lawas River, sir," began the dark-faced youth, giving a few particulars about himself. "Got into the habit of speaking Dyak there, it being the only language I knew at the time. Afterwards emigrated to Labuan, and picked up what was con-

sidered among ordinary inhabitants my native language as a British subject, but what a missionary told me was swearing or nautical British tongue. Discarded nautical British and entered as a student of classy English under this missionary, who, after a short period of my society, pronounced me as a most promising chap. I owe a lot to that missionary, sir."

"I'm glad you're grateful," commented M'Whizzle, impatiently.

"Nobody else on the island wouldn't lent me anything," explained the candidate.

"Um!" muttered M'Whizzle. "You're in debt, then?"

"Nothing to speak of, sir, not down here in Singapore," the other reassured him. "Up in Labuan they all speak of it. I used to get disgusted sometimes at these peoples. Jealous of me because I'd borrowed ten dollars from this missionary, being a promising fellow, and they couldn't. They are envious peoples in Labuan, sir."

"They seem to be," answered M'Whizzle, coldly.

"The best way to pay them back for their envy, sir," suggested Podd, "would be to startle them by paying me a fat salary every week. They would grind their teeth when they heard about that, sir."

"I don't know that you are going to get any salary," said M'Whizzle, teasingly, smiling at Mr Templeton. "We'll see how you behave. You may not suit me. You are a British subject?"

"As far as can be at present ascertained," replied the youth in an important voice. "I was at the age of three found at the Lawas River by the missionaries,

but before that time nobody has been able to find out much regarding me. I am what we call a moot point."

"You're not a Dyak?"

"I bear the good old English name of Podd, sir," returned the other with dignity.

"But you might have stolen that," pointed out the merciless M'Whizzle.

"No, sir, I don't steal," returned Podd, contemptuously. "Not names. When I was nine years old I was 'dopted by a child of nine years of age in England, who presented me all his spare clothes. The name A. Archibald Podd was on the clothes, sir, so the missionaries gave me that name, being short of marking ink."

"What does 'A' stand for?" inquired M'Whizzle, suspiciously.

The candidate hesitated. His small canvas-shod feet beat the gravel uncomfortably. "They didn't know what the first name was," he muttered in a shamefaced way. "They tell me also that one of these missionaries was a bad-joking fellow, sir!"

His eye rolled uneasily round the circle.

"If I could find the missionary that gave me that name when I was a helpless infant and couldn't object," he remarked in low, injured tones, "I'd teach him to call anyone Ahasuerus. Making a fellow like me put up with continuous insult all my life. Is that a Christian action, sir? No, sir, it is not."

"It's a good old Bible name," remarked Mrs Nixon, soothingly.

"Admitted, Madam, admitted," agreed Podd, bow-

ing. "But it is not a job-getting name, or a name, I find, that the ladies take to."

"There's no need to tell them," said Mrs Nixon, laughing.

"It's a nasty thing to have to conceal, a name like Ahasuerus, Missis," explained Podd, indignantly. "I myself don't like spending my time hiding a name like that."

"Don't worry about such a little thing, my good fellow," M'Whizzle advised him. "Now, you'd better go straight back and wait for me down at my office. I think I shall be able to find you employment. Nabarally will show you the way."

He spoke again in Telegu to his chuprassy, and the two men left.

"An extraordinary person," said M'Whizzle, laughing, when they had disappeared. "But we need extraordinary men in our service. I think he will suit."

"I rather liked him," Maud remarked. . . . "Now shall we play clock golf?"

"I'm willing," said Nixon.

"And you?"

"My dear Miss Anderby," returned Lochinvar, "I never play European games, you know."

"I'd forgotten for the moment. Then we'll go and look round the stables. You've never seen them, Mrs Nixon."

"I should like to," said the old lady, getting up.

The whole party left the lawn.

CHAPTER II

THE stables lay at the back of the bungalow, facing the town and overlooking the main road. They were in the opposite direction to M'Whizzle's house, but, as Archibald Podd pointed out to the chuprassy, it was possible to visit them on the way thither. As an enthusiast, he could not dream of missing such an opportunity.

"If the Tuan M'Whizzle finds we have not gone straight," said the chuprassy in good English, "he will not be pleased——"

Podd waved his hand carelessly.

"I'm taking great interest in the Singapore Derby," he explained. "This morning I was reading a paper and I see there was such a race, and since that time I have taken great interest in it. This Mr Templeton owns the favourite, I perceived."

"A fine horse, sir," said the chuprassy in a respectful voice. They turned towards the stables.

"I'll tell you what I think after I have looked it over," returned Podd, in the tone of a superior. "I suppose they don't keep dogs inside here?" he inquired, pausing reflectively, his hand on the latch.

Receiving an assurance, he flung the gate of the stable yard open, and, with a slight addition to his customary swagger, marched in.

The approach of the party had been noticed from the head-groom's bungalow. The white head-groom, warned of the advent of something that looked in the distance like a European, had gulped down his tea, and was now at his post.

"It is the Tuan Ryan," muttered the flustered chuprassy, as Archibald Podd paused on the threshold and gazed inquiringly at the small watchful figure in a khaki suit and gaiters that stood eyeing them.

"What do you want?" inquired the groom.

"You are Mr Broyan, they tell me," returned Podd, advancing warily. He felt that this was almost worse than a dog. "You have the advantage of me, as you stand on your own dunghill. I merely look in and see you doing it."

"Now you have done, suppose you go," said the head-groom.

"It is a pleasant picture, worth coming from far-away Borneo to observe, sir," said Podd, flatteringly. "I never see such stables," he added, casting a slow admiring glance round the square of roughly-timbered stalls thatched with attap. "The sight of them, sir, makes me almost wish I was a horse, sir."

"They are the finest in Singapore," said the chuprassy in a low voice.

"Hey!" called out Ryan, "You're Tuan M'Whizzle's man, ain't you? Who is this chap?"

"Permit me, mister," said Podd, taking off his topee with a flourish. "You are Mr Bryan of Singapore, a name well known and honoured by all we racing men. I am young Mr Podd of Borneo."

"Never heard the name," said the groom, bluntly.

"Millions of people are like you, sir," Podd assured him in a comforting voice. "We cannot all of us be household words. I am, of course, more of a gardening word. But my object now is not to be known to millions, but to only a few select friends. I have had my cards printed with my name on. An excellent step, don't you think, for my friends to be reminded of me. Here is it."

He extracted one after much fumbling in a large pocket-book covered with shiny cloth.

"A. Archibald Podd," the groom read. "What does the 'A' stand for?"

"It's the first letter of the alphabet that I learnt," said Podd evasively. "Up in Labuan school they always begin to teach the alphabet from that end, working away gradually till we get down to Z, by which time, I can tell you, mister, we are in a fine perspiration. But we must not complain, for a clerk without a knowledge of the alphabet is in a box, I can tell you. In fact, he soon dies out. He is not likely to be competed for by employers, like me. Mr Lochinvar M'Whizzle wouldn't want such a fellow for his confident clerk. Not while I was in the neighbourhood."

"Are you going to work for Tuan M'Whizzle?" asked Ryan, displaying fresh interest.

"He hasn't said anything about working," explained Podd, brightly. "But I suppose that will be included in my duties. I am entering service as his confident clerk."

"You mean confidential clerk," corrected Ryan, with a laugh. "Now I understand." He held out

his hand. "Glad to meet you, Podd. We shall be neighbours."

"Next-door neighbours, if possible, I hope," said A. Archibald Podd, with an agreeable smile. It was plain that this European sportsman was impressed by his being in the service of the police. Not that he was in that service yet quite. But the distinction seemed hardly worth calling attention to.

"I hope, sir, I shall not have the pleasure of calling on you in my professional capacity," he said, bowing.

"One never can tell," returned Mr Ryan. "There are some rum uns in the racing business. And when there's a big race on it pays to keep friends with the policemen. Like to have a look round?"

"Immensely, sir."

"Got any horses up in Labuan?"

"One or two," returned Archibald, discreetly.

The little groom led him quickly up to a stable and flung open the door.

"You've nothing like that, I'm certain," he said, with a ring of pride.

Archibald looked in, and made out in the semi-darkness the hindquarters of the animal.

"It's a yellow one," he muttered in a low voice. "In Borneo I've never seen such a colour."

"That's Old Joke, the favourite for the Derby," said Ryan. "Called Old Joke because he's a chestnut."

"A wonderful horse," agreed Archibald. "Such a beautiful colour."

"I don't know so much about the colour," commented the groom. "But on his present form he's a cert for the race."

"A wonderful form," agreed Podd, looking again. "At present I can only see the back of it, but it is certainly wonderful. I suppose you couldn't make it turn round? I should like to see its face."

The head groom stared, then smiled compassionately as he unhooked the lower half of the door.

"Come inside," he said.

"It won't bite, I s'pose, mister?" inquired Podd, entering gingerly. "Up in Borneo they have a horse that bites dreadfully. A personal friend of mine, offering a banana, had his finger taken. And yet we're told to be kind to dumb animals!"

"Get over," said the groom. The hoofs of the animal rattled alarmingly as it obeyed the instruction. Archibald followed his guide cautiously, and stood beside the manger.

"Pretty thing," he said, coaxingly, stroking the glossy neck. "Quiet, quiet, *diam*. It's very restless, isn't it?"

"The quietest horse I know," said Ryan.

"I like its face," commented Podd, becoming reassured. "A trustworthy face. And fine strong legs. I'm glad to be able to cast an eye over it, and fin' out something about its form. . . . This is the horse for my money. . . . Gee up, old fellar!"

He smacked the animal's flank with an affectation of ease, and, escaping a responsive kick by inches, fled to the farthest corner of the stable.

"It's only his playfulness," explained Ryan. "He wouldn't hurt a fly, really."

"I like its face end better," gasped Podd, recovering himself. "It is a more trustworthy end."

"Watch his ears," directed Ryan, easily. "They always go back when he's going to let out in earnest. . . . Hello!"

Archibald Podd, who had been creeping gingerly towards the door, took the last two yards at the double, and flattened himself against the wall.

"That was only a fly on one ear," remarked the groom, reassuringly. "Soho! old fellow. . . . There's no need to be alarmed, Mr Podd."

"I'm—not alarmed," explained Archibald, in a jerky voice. "But I'm cautious by nature. You don't find me playing about much with animal's hind legs."

"If you've seen enough, we will go," said Ryan. He glanced out into the yard, and at once turned and looked at Podd with an expression of some consternation on his face.

"You've done it now," he whispered, in an alarmed voice. "Here's Mr Templeton and Mr M'Whizzle and a whole party of them coming into the yard, and I've had strict instructions that on no account was I to let anyone into the favourite's stable. You'll have to hide."

"Mr M'Whizzle!" gasped Archibald. "He told me to proceed directly to his house and wait."

"'Ere," whispered the groom. "Slip up that ladder into the hay loft. Shut the trap-door behind you. Nobody ever goes up there."

He stood for an instant anxiously watching his instructions carried out, and then sallied into the yard.

The party from the bungalow had been delayed some time in the kitchen garden while Lochinvar

M'Whizzle had explained in the presence of a banana plant the uses bananas had been put to at various times by celebrated Chinese criminals. Mrs Nixon was now yawning openly, but in spite of that fact the enthusiasm of the Chief of the Secret Police appeared unabated. He was a man who took a real interest in his work, and what is less rare, a man who imagined others also did so.

"Horses, of course, figure in the annals of crime more often than bananas, I need not tell you, Miss Anderby," he began, on entering the yard.

"You're very interesting, I'm sure," said Mrs Templeton, encouragingly. "Do go on, Mr M'Whizzle."

"A little more interesting than a banana," muttered Nixon.

"I wonder how you'd take the finger prints of a banana," Maud asked, flippantly.

"Ask him: he knows," said Nixon, sotto voce.

"I suppose, inquired Maud, loudly, "the finger-prints of a horse cannot be taken?"

"Don't be absurd," ejaculated Mrs Templeton.

"As it happens, Miss Anderby's question is not absurd," interposed Lochinar M'Whizzle. "Not at all. The hoof of the horse is really the nail of a finger. The animal walks on its toe nail. A hoof-print varies for every horse. In my records I have photographs of typical hoof-prints of the Clydesdale, shire horse, racehorse, hackney, cab-horse, pony. Their divergence is astonishing. And then the nailing of the shoes. Sometimes a nail missing, sometimes a nail bent! No, I flatter myself that there are few

horses that can conceal their goings and comings from the experts of the secret police. Good afternoon, Ryan."

"Good afternoon, Mr M'Whizzle," said the groom. He had looked around and found to his relief that the Chief of the Secret Police's chuprassy had cleared off on the approach of the party.

"Can we see Old Joke, Mr Ryan?" asked Maud.

"Certainly, Miss," replied the head groom.

Maud disappeared into the stable, followed by Nixon.

"How is it?" asked Mr Templeton, nodding his head towards the door.

"Couldn't be better, sir," replied the groom in a satisfied voice. "Ahmat had 'im out this morning. Took him along hard for two furlongs. Came back a fair treat. 'E's a dead cert for the race. Take my word for it."

"There's a chance for you, M'Whizzle, to make a little," said Mr Templeton, banteringly.

"How can that be done?"

"Put fifty dollars on Old Joke for the Derby. Ryan says he's bound to win."

"It wouldn't do for a man in my position to bet," said the Chief of the Secret Police positively.

"Why don't you, then, Mrs Nixon?" asked the merchant. "You can't lose."

"I wouldn't say 'can't lose,' sir," said Ryan, cautiously. "Everyone in Singapore doesn't think as we do. The Rajah of Tidatau has two certain runners. They say he's put his shirt on one of them. If he loses he's done for."

"Why done for?" asked Mrs Nixon. "What is the good of a shirt in this hot climate?"

"He stands to lose fifty thousand dollars," said Ryan in a solemn voice. "And if he does lose, the money lenders and chitties are going to take him to court and bankrupt him. That's how the talk goes down-town."

"Have you heard anything about that?" Mrs Templeton asked M'Whizzle.

"Hum," said Lochinvar, non-committally.

"He's being silent in six languages," cried the merchant in delight. "Now, my dear, what a question! Does the Chief of the Secret Police know about the doings in Singapore of the Rajah of Tidatau? Ask rather what doesn't he know. He's probably got men watching the fellow all the time. But to ask such a question! Surely you know how discreet Mr Lochinvar M'Whizzle is by this time?"

"Yes, it was stupid of me," murmured Mrs Templeton, abashed.

"We policemen have our secrets," said M'Whizzle, with an amused smile at her confusion. "But I'm betraying nothing when I say among intimates that there is a certain amount of truth in what our worthy host hints at. We have our eye on the scion of Tidatau, yes, very much so."

"I thought as much," said the merchant, gravely.

"Would it surprise you, Mrs Templeton," continued M'Whizzle in a quiet voice, "if I said I could tell you the name of the girl he danced twice with at the Tingle Tangle dance-house last night?"

"Don't mention such a place," implored the lady.

"Or what he had for supper afterwards, and where he went to next to play poker, and who helped him home to bed?"

"Really," remarked Mrs Templeton, "this is too much. We might as well be in Russia."

"The innocent have nothing to fear," M'Whizzle assured her.

"And most of the guilty are policemen themselves, so they say," suggested Mrs Nixon, spitefully. "However, where is this wonderful horse? I think I *shall* put a little on him."

The groom flung open the top door of the stable, which had closed slightly in spite of the lack of breeze. The hands of Nixon and Maud Anderby, surprised in the act of trying to pat the same spot on the favourite's neck, strayed off in different directions.

"A noble-looking animal," commented M'Whizzle, with an angry stare.

"And very quiet, sir," said Ryan.

"It seems to me that it will stand anything," said M'Whizzle, angrily.

"Come in, Mr M'Whizzle, and try," suggested Maud, brightly.

M'Whizzle declined. He remarked, with a slight sneer, that there didn't seem room for him.

"Oh, we'll clear out," offered Nixon.

"I think you're wise not to come in, Mr M'Whizzle," said Maud. "Unless, of course, you're anxious to carry away on you a specimen of its finger-print. He has a way, sometimes, of kicking out at strangers, haven't you, Old Joke?"

Mr Templeton motioned Ryan after him as the

party left the yard, and kept him in conversation for some minutes, walking slowly towards the bungalow.

The groom came back as quickly as possible, and at once went to the hay-loft to advise Podd that the danger had passed. To his slight astonishment, he found the hay-loft empty. Evidently his new friend had taken the very first opportunity to escape.

CHAPTER III

Most of the Singapore well-to-do live in the suburb of Tanglin. Usually the Chief of the Secret Police for the time being lies there also, glad to be quit of his job after office hours. Lochinvar M'Whizzle, no ordinary C.S.P., was peculiar in that he refused to occupy the comfortable bungalow in Tanglin provided by the Government, and chose to live in a large house right in the middle of the Kampong Glam.

It was a house, not a bungalow. Bungalows are guileless edifices hiding nothing from the passer-by, and certainly not in such keeping with the sinister M'Whizzle as the residence he had chosen. It was assuredly not guileless. Its dirty, yellow-green shutters alone were sufficient to inspire a cold shiver in the spine of the European who glanced at them. Upon the callow native they exercised an influence akin to that of the evil eye. They were always closed, but one felt they were always watchful. No one passed them unobserved or exempt from the malign influence they exhaled. In short, the gaunt, silent, three-storey house acted as a wet blanket on the whole neighbourhood, and had it been struck by lightning during one of the violent thunderstorms which raged constantly over the town, the disaster would have been welcomed by the whole native

population as a good day's work on the part of the evil spirits infesting the upper air.

The front of the house faced a thoroughfare rendered respectable by tramway lines and trams, but the back gave on the worst slum in Singapore, a slum where dwelt, closely packed as sardines, Japanese, Klings, Chinese, Javanese, Bengalis and Arabs, together with a fair sprinkling of beings so low in the scale of humanity that no nationality would be found to own them. Rents had gone down considerably in this slum since the Chief of the Secret Police had taken up residence in the neighbourhood, but the news gradually filtering through that M'Whizzle, a being apart, had come to live among them because he liked their wickedness, and the frequent sight of him as he haunted the bazaars in native dress, had allayed suspicion.

But when he was seen coming along at a snail's pace about 6 p.m. on the day of his visit to the Templeton's, accompanied by five Europeans of suspicious cleanliness, indignation spread through the slum like a prairie fire, and several of the inhabitants gave notice to their landlord at once.

One old Chinese barber, who had rented the corner of the street for many years, even talked loudly about an action for damages. He alleged that the entire party had stopped and watched him at work on a client, and that the nervousness engendered thereby had caused the hand holding his instrument to tremble and puncture the said client's ear-drum.

Altogether there was in truth some danger of a riot, and the fat Chinese landlord felt relieved when, peep-

ing through his bamboo blind in a quiver, he beheld Lochinvar M'Whizzle, after exhibiting to his guests the contents of the shop of a dealer in charms, and the tattooing on a baby's stomach, lift the latch of the back door and lead the way into his sinister abode.

"You have now some faint idea, all of you," said M'Whizzle, pausing in the backyard after shutting and bolting the door, "of the mysterious and complex life which has gone on unchanged in the East for thousands of years, and still continues under our very noses."

"The air down here is very trying," said Mrs Nixon, in her best manner.

"It is the smell of the bazaar," explained Lochinvar M'Whizzle, enthusiastically. "Compact of incense and spices, dried fish, tripang, goats, sago, men and the crowded harems. It gets into one's blood."

"It is certainly getting into mine," said Mrs Templeton, producing a scent bottle.

"It gets into one's blood," repeated Lochinvar M'Whizzle, frowning slightly, "and fascination ensues. Perhaps I am differently constituted to the usual European," he continued, his small black eyes glowing, "but to me the mere sniff of the bazaar brings rapture. I feel my pulses beating as I remember that Aroun al Asched in Bagdad many thousands of years ago sniffed the same aged indestructible air, and that out of his intoxication was born that wonderful series of romances, the Thousand and One Nights. Sometimes the charm becomes irresistible. Then when the hot night closes and the dim moon whitens the city, I leave my desk and, donning native

garb, sally from that door to live again the life of the oriental adventurer."

"Out of that door?" asked Mrs Nixon, pointing.

"Yes," answered Lochinvar, gravely. "Out of that door."

"It's a nice door," commented Mrs Nixon. "One of the nicest doors I have seen since I left England. I like your taste in green paint, Mr M'Whizzle. A nice little back yard, too," she added, looking round.

"We will now leave the courtyard," said M'Whizzle with emphasis, "and go into the house."

He led the way into the pitch darkness of a narrow passage.

"It's very romantic," murmured Mrs Templeton, "and isn't he interesting? He has walked us right into the middle ages."

There was a slight splash ahead.

"Look out for the puddle," cried M'Whizzle in a whisper. "Keep close to the wall. Who was that?"

"I am afraid it was me," remarked Mr Templeton in a testy voice. "You ought to have a light here. Do you mind my striking a match?"

"Do, by all means," said M'Whizzle, regretfully. "But a light will destroy the charm."

It did. The puddle in particular looked most objectionable. But in spite of that the party insisted on Mr Templeton striking another match, and yet another, while they negotiated it. Swinging aside an awkwardly fixed bamboo curtain, they then entered the house.

It was a badly-lighted house, that much was plain at first impression. They stood bunched in the middle

of a large room. The glimmer of a tiny lamp on the floor showed a patch of bamboo matting. The rest was darkness.

Lochinvar M'Whizzle clapped his hands. "This is an ante-chamber," he said in a low voice. "A servant will come with a lamp to pilot us into the lounge."

He clapped his hands again.

"I've read about that way of calling servants," said Mrs Templeton, in an excited whisper, "but I never imagined anything so delightfully oriental really existed."

"I should prefer an electric bell myself," returned Mrs Nixon, drily.

"You are so very practical," retorted Mrs Templeton.

In the ensuing silence M'Whizzle clapped his hands loudly again.

"That ought to do something," muttered Nixon to Maud. "The third time's lucky."

"Shall I light another match," suggested Mr Templeton, anxious to help.

"On no account," replied M'Whizzle, in an irritated whisper. "I don't know what's happened. I'll go myself."

He disappeared, and from the near darkness came the sound of a voice talking angrily in familiar pidgeon Malay.

"That's the language they all understand and obey," whispered Nixon, as a Chinese 'boy' came sulkily forward, carrying an ordinary paraffin lamp.

"The lounge," said M'Whizzle triumphantly, when

the party, having followed the lamp through a passage or two, were again assembled. "The middle of the floor is laid for our evening meal, as I instructed. Please avoid treading on the bread."

He left the room, and the party walked carefully round, respectfully examining the decorations. The walls were hung with crude black and white brush-work panels depicting dragons and Chinese warriors in mortal combat while slit-eyed maidens sauntered about calmly gathering flowers and storks sat on small gnarled trees in nests of ample proportions. Low cushions were scattered about the room. These a pair of servants, richly attired in pale-blue silk, entering noiselessly, arranged about the middle of the floor.

Lochinar M'Whizzle re-appeared, smirking self-consciously at Maud. He had changed his European suit for the flowing robe of a Chinese mandarin.

"Our meal is to be Chinese," he announced, beaming round.

"Oh," groaned Mrs Nixon in Maud's ear.

"I had intended to give you a Cingalese repast," M'Whizzle continued, "but I received a parcel of bird's nests—the nest of the esculent swallow—from an old mandarin friend in Canton this morning, and I thought we'd have them while they were fresh. I have another Chinese robe, Miss Anderby, suitable for a lady of the high nobility. I should be honoured if you would wear it."

Ignoring Mrs Nixon's whispered warning, Maud enthusiastically said it would be lovely.

"The robe belonged to an empress of the eighteenth century," said M'Whizzle. "It was the last one she

wore. She died, poor woman, quite young—of small-pox."

"Now, Maud, remember your manners! Eldest first!" cried Mrs Nixon. "Give your elders the first chance."

"I don't think anyone ought to wear it," said the merchant. "Not after smallpox."

"My dear sir, it's quite harmlêss," protested Lochinvar M'Whizzle, smiling. "If it had not been, I should have been dead long ago. I use it in cold weather as a bed-quilt."

"All the same, it ought not to be worn after small-pox," decided the merchant.

"Giving it to Maud might cause jealousy, which, as you know, Mr M'Whizzle, is almost as catching," remarked Mrs Nixon.

"Very well," said M'Whizzle, looking at Maud with a disappointed air, "I should have liked you to wear it."

"So should I."

"I'll have it thoroughly disinfected and sent to you," said Lochinvar, eagerly. "You would look well in it. Sometimes I've caught you looking quite like a Chinese."

"Thank you," Maud said, simply.

There really did not seem much more to say, but he evidently meant well, so she seated herself on the cushion next to him, and awaited the bird's-nest soup. She had never been a hostess herself, but from experience of how her mother worried over an ordinary European dinner-party she could imagine her host's anxiety. But whatever his inward feelings,

outwardly he looked unperturbed. The smile on his small face grew irritating in its complacency. She had never liked him much, and now she caught herself hoping that the bird's-nest soup would come up smoked. She longed to see that smile come off. But it did not come off. Not even after the soup was served and the smile of every other diner had died away.

The soup was awful, there was no other name for it. Still he smiled on. She gave him credit for being at any rate a brave man.

They brought the soup in cracked china bowls. It was thin, tasteless, sticky, and of a dirty white colour. It was tepid.

From under her eyelids she watched him absorb spoonful after spoonful. His smile grew positively beatific. In horror and amazement, she began to realize that he actually liked the stuff.

"I've heard a great deal about bird's-nest soup," remarked Mr Templeton, putting down his spoon. "This seems to me like flour and water with a touch of gum."

"I know it's bird's nest," said Mrs Nixon.

"How do you?" asked her son.

"I've just got a mouthful of feathers," replied the old lady in a disgusted voice.

"Ah," M'Whizzle explained. "You've come across a last year's nest. Some of them do get feathery, and the servants are too lazy or too ignorant to clean them properly. A Chinese gourmand does not mind a feather or two, provided the taste of the nest is to his satisfaction."

"And are these?" demanded the merchant. "I couldn't taste anything. Most insipid, I thought, if you'll excuse me saying so."

"The average Western palate," said M'Whizzle, "coarsened by the use of spirits and tobacco—needless to say, I am not referring to you, Mr Templeton——"

"I quite understand that," said the merchant shortly.

"Coarsened by the use of spirits and tobacco," went on his host, "and the too free use of meat and condiments, is unable to appreciate the delicate flavours that appeal to the Eastern gourmet. You will be surprised to know that the birds' nests we are having are the finest flavoured I have tasted this year."

"I shall have to try again," said Nixon, picking up his spoon.

He tasted, grimaced. Lochinvar M'Whizzle laughed heartily.

"Why," he said, "they're Kinabatangan nests, worth their weight in gold in Canton. Dozens of lives are lost every year in climbing up the slippery sides of the caves to get such nests. They are enormous caves, those up the Kinabatangan. The swifts whose nests these are—they are made, as you know, from the saliva of the bird——"

"I didn't know anything of the sort," said Mr Templeton, who, encouraged by the worth of the nests, had taken up his spoon again.

"The swifts inhabit the caves at night, and enormous bats by day. The floors of the caves are

crowded with coffins of generations of Borneo aborigines——"

Mr Templeton put down his spoon with an air of decision.

"I think we might have on the fish, if you'll allow me to make the suggestion, M'Whizzle," he said in an irritated voice.

M'Whizzle clapped his hands.

"My guests are always masters of my household," he murmured, making an obeisance with the dignity of an Asiatic potentate. "The mention of Borneo reminds me of that man Podd. I told him to wait for me. He must have been waiting hours."

"Waiting since you sent him here this afternoon?" Maud exclaimed, indignantly. "That's too slack of you!"

"He won't mind waiting," commented Mr Templeton.

"An Asiatic characteristic," M'Whizzle told her, laughing. "To sit still and wait is no hardship to the oriental. But, nevertheless, I think I'll send for him. I have your permission?"

He looked round and, receiving mute assent, clapped his hands again.

"If you can't come quicker when I give you the signal," he said, when the 'boy' tardily appeared, "I shall have to give you a month's notice."

The Chinaman regarded him impassively.

"When the Tuan smacks his hands," he replied, "we in the kitchen are uncertain whether he is in the act of killing a mosquito or is in need of assistance. If the Tuan would, instead, shout 'Hai, boy, dash you, come here,' as he does in the absence of

guests, we should know for certain that the presence of one of us was required."

M'Whizzle looked round uneasily.

"Take that soup away," he remarked in icy tones, "and bring on the shark's fin hash. And, 'boy'——"

"Tuan!"

"In the quarter of the domestics there reposes one, Podd, who has come from Borneo to enter my service. Bid him resort hither."

"Tuan!"

The 'boy' withdrew, but in a minute or so came back with the intelligence that there was no man of the description about the place. The chuprassy, he said, admitted that there ought to have been such a man, but he was lost.

Mr Templeton laughed. "He did not look the sort of fellow to get lost!" he remarked.

"These people are most annoying," muttered M'Whizzle. "Send in the chuprassy."

The man came sheepishly. His tale sounded obscure. The man Podd, it appeared, had obstinately dawdled behind as he, the chuprassy, hastened homewards in accordance with the instructions of his master. More than once he had warned Podd of the danger he ran of incurring their master's anger, but Podd had laughed contemptuously and eventually disappeared round a corner.

M'Whizzle, in a strict cross-examination, failing to obtain any additions to this story, dismissed the man, and clapped his hands again.

The 'boys' appeared with more dilapidated china bowls, which the guests accepted doubtfully. Chop

sticks were handed round. Mrs Nixon examined hers, and requested that a spoon should be supplied her. At that moment a telephone bell began to ring violently.

M'Whizzle who, chop sticks in hand, had begun his task of pick and shovel, and was acquiring masses of shark-fin hash with almost Chinese rapidity, laid down his bowl.

"More work," he said, with a laugh. "They can't leave me alone!"

He went into the next room, his office it was surmised, shutting the door carefully behind him. Mr Templeton called attention to his precaution against being overheard, and said he was a born detective.

His wife agreed, and added that he was one of the most mysteriously interesting men she had ever met, a statement which Maud knew embraced a good deal.

"But I will not have any more of his dinners," said Mrs Nixon, firmly.

He was away a long time. The grinding of the telephone bell told them that he was ringing up someone himself.

He came back at last, seated himself unconcernedly, and finished his portion of shark-fin hash.

"It's a coincidence your being here," he remarked to Mr Templeton. "The message concerned you. But I rang up the Central and got all my men in motion. So you will not be troubled until to-morrow."

He clapped his hands for the next course.

"If it is not too inquisitive," said the merchant, curiously, "I should like to know how I'm concerned."

"Apparently one of your horses has been stolen,"

said M'Whizzle. "The animal you are thinking of running for the Singapore Derby."

"What!" exclaimed Mr Templeton, in an agitated voice.

"Your groom, Ryan, seems a shade perturbed about it," pursued M'Whizzle. "I told him not to worry. We shall have the horse by to-morrow night."

"But," said Mr Templeton, getting up, "he's quite right to be upset. It's a most serious thing. Half Singapore has money on Old Joke. They'd never forgive me if anything went wrong. And I've risked a large sum myself. We must get home at once."

"You will wait for the trepang tart?" urged M'Whizzle. "It's my *pièce de résistance*."

"We can't, positively."

"I shall be dreadfully disappointed," he pressed. "Do persuade your husband, Mrs Templeton."

"We must go," replied Mrs Templeton, firmly.

"Then, if you must," yielded the Chief of the Secret Police. He smiled indulgently. "I know how you feel, and I sympathize. Look out for me in the morning."

"You don't think there's any chance of our losing Old Joke, then?" asked Mrs Templeton.

M'Whizzle surveyed her, and smiled again.

"I may say that my intention is to give the crime my personal attention," he said, reassuringly.

"Thank you," she murmured, relieved. "Indeed, thank you."

But, in spite of his assurance, it was an anxious party that in two separate gharries hurried back to Tanglin.

CHAPTER IV

It is a sad commentary on human nature that the first effect of a disaster is the general discovery that somebody else is to blame for it. In the Nixon's gharry the opinion was expressed that gross carelessness had been exhibited by the owner of Old Joke. The favourite ought to have been better guarded. Those in the gharry of the Templetons also came to the conclusion that the favourite ought to have been guarded better—by Nixon as District Officer and those under him. Both Mr and Mrs Templeton agreed that district officers ought to have more sense of their obligations towards the community than to go gadding about Kampong Glam with their mothers, leaving their districts in charge of nobody. Indeed, Mrs Templeton, who never had liked Mrs Nixon, seemed to be of the opinion that it was a mistake, and weakening to the moral fibre of government officials in general that they should possess mothers or other female relatives.

Without going quite so far as his wife, the merchant stepped out of the gharry into his palatial bungalow firmly convinced that he had been unfairly treated, and determined to adjust the balance as soon as possible. He sent for Ryan at once, and was occupying the period of waiting by pacing the library when

the telephone rang. It was Lochinvar M'Whizzle issuing his final instructions to everybody for the night, before going to bed. Maud left her step-father with his ear glued to the receiver, making notes, and went to the lamp-room. By dint of a lengthy process of examination and selection, she secured a hurricane lamp filled with paraffin and passably trimmed. She lighted it and, creeping out of the back of the bungalow, proceeded rapidly to the stables.

She found them, as she expected, in darkness and absolutely unguarded. It was enough to make anyone steal a few more horses, but she resisted the temptation and went through the widely open door direct to the stable lately occupied by Old Joke.

Here everything was in order. A pet mongoose in its hutch in the empty stall seemed much as usual. The bedding of straw and bracken in the favourite's stall looked clean and not more than usually disturbed. The rack was half-full of hay, and the usual piece of rock salt lay in the manger. The horse had evidently been quietly walked away. She flashed her lamp about. The robbers, as far as she could see, had left no sign of their identity. The unoccupied stall next door, where the hutch reposed, had a plank flooring. Pieces of harness, brushes, a boot or so lay about.

She had finished her examination of this stall also, and was about to go elsewhere when some dust in a corner beside the mongoose hutch caught her eye. She had reached the stage of her investigation when she felt confident of being disappointed. She bent down with a slightly weary air. But in a moment all feeling of lassitude had departed, and she found

herself gazing with intense interest at the perfect imprints of a pair of naked feet. It was apparent to her at once, with all her inexperience of the East, that none of the Malay stablemen had left these imprints. The Malay foot, she knew, was very short and square with a high instep. But the imprints were those of a man with an enormous flat foot; and such a type of foot was only owned by one race in Singapore, the Kling or native of Southern India.

The intruder had been standing partly on tiptoe to peep over the partition between the two stalls. That was very clear from the unequal indentation of the dust. He must have been a short man, for this partition was not much more than five feet high.

Having got thus far, Maud stood up. She possessed a secret. There at once rose within her a natural craving to share it without delay. Evidently all that was now necessary was to find a short Kling with large feet and an interest in horses. It would not require much skill for a man in Lochinvar M'Whizzle's position to do that. . . . But for her to help him to find the missing racehorse was the last thing she wished. He might, she knew, want to marry her out of gratitude!

Now she had found out a fact worth knowing, she could not help admitting to herself something she had declined to admit before, namely, that if the racehorse were recovered without the help of that estimable person, Lochinvar M'Whizzle, she for one would not be unduly depressed. The fact that he was so certain of finding it was enough to make anyone hope he would not.

Although she had not expected to find Alec Nixon at the stable, it seemed to her rather slack of him not to have put in an appearance on the scene of such an important crime before that. Now, perhaps it was well he had not done so. Had he found the foot-prints he, in duty bound, would inform M'Whizzle, as his senior officer, of their existence. The almost overwhelming impulse to tell even Alec was therefore to be resisted.

She lifted the hutch bodily off the box on which it reposed, moved the box along a few inches to cover the foot-prints, and replaced the hutch.

She had completed this, and was engaged in the delicate task of smoothing the dust on the floor with a piece of bracken to conceal all traces of what she had done, when footsteps sounded outside the stable.

Dropping the piece of bracken over the partition, she struck a well-marked attitude of ease and awaited the visitor.

It was Nixon. He also carried a hurricane lamp. He looked surprised and, she fancied to her indignation, a shade disgusted to find her there.

"I thought I'd take time by the forelock and have a quiet look round," he said, explaining his presence.

"You ought to have looked round first, instead of worrying about time," Maud said. "I came here half-an-hour ago. My mongoose is all right."

"It's lucky you didn't come earlier," said Nixon.

"Why?"

"They might have taken you instead of the race-horse."

"I wish they had," said Maud, calmly. "I'm longing for an adventure of some sort."

"Carried off to Tidatau and introduced to the Rajah's six wives!"

"Has he six?"

"The latest bulletin said six," replied Nixon. "But that was some months ago."

"You've come to the conclusion, then, that the Rajah is the man who has taken Old Joke?" Maud asked, feeling it was time to give the conversation a turn upwards.

"I should think he did," replied the District Officer. "He seems to be the one to gain by it. And he's quite capable of doing it, too."

"I suppose you'll search Tidatau and the palace?"

"That's in M'Whizzle's hand," said Alec Nixon. "The Rajah is Royalty, and I don't think M'Whizzle can do much in that way without good grounds. What I am sorry for is that any racehorse should have been stolen in my district. It looks bad."

"Everyone's blaming you already," said Maud, comfortingly. "Indeed, from what my mother said on the way home just now, the idea is gaining ground that you stole Old Joke yourself in order to gain credit for Mr M'Whizzle."

"That's kind of her."

"As you know," Maud went on, "we think the world of Mr M'Whizzle. But, personally, I can't help hoping he does not find Old Joke for at anyrate a week or two. He'd be disappointed if the case were too easy."

"The sooner the better, I should think," Nixon remarked.

"I suppose you wouldn't subscribe to a stained-glass window of Mr M'Whizzle?" asked Maud. "I should like one for my sitting-room, to be reminded of him when my mother isn't there."

"He's about the limit," said Nixon, goaded into candour.

"You're not going to try and find this racehorse yourself?" Maud asked. "Competition isn't always bad, even in your service."

"Well," said Nixon, consideringly. He sat down on the mongoose's hutch.

"Well?" said Maud, inquiringly.

It was just then that a mysterious noise commenced overhead. Something heavy and soft, it seemed, was being bumped at irregular intervals about the loft above. In the brief silences between the sounds flakes of whitewash detached from the ceiling dropped lightly on the ground. Maud and Alec, listening intently, heard next a scraping noise as of a body being dragged with difficulty over a rough floor.

"Sounds like someone in the hay-loft," said Maud in a scared whisper.

For answer, Nixon got up from the mongoose's hutch, tiptoed over the floor to the ladder, and with a signal to her to stay where she was, ascended and disappeared.

His head re-appeared the next moment. It seemed that he could not see anything. Asked why, he whispered hoarsely that he thought it was because it was pitch dark. Whether extremely flippant or

very stupid, such an answer was enough to irritate anybody.

Maud got up from her seat on the hutch, seized the lamp, and, rattling it menacingly, climbed the ladder.

"Thank you ever so much," said Nixon, stretching out a hand.

"Roll yourself out of the way," said Maud, sternly. "I'm coming up myself."

She climbed in smartly, and, still on her knees, flashed the lamp around.

"Nothing here," said Nixon in a relieved whisper. "False alarm. Must have been a rat we heard or something."

"More likely an elephant," said Maud, sarcastically.

At that moment the noise began again. In the confined space of the hayloft it sounded loud enough to be alarming.

"It's underneath the hay," muttered the District Officer. "If it's an elephant it's a monster. I think you'd better go down. Give me the lamp."

"No," said Maud. Her voice sounded brave, but she felt herself trembling. In the dim light of the lamp the pile of hay could be seen heaving convulsively.

"I insist on your going down," hissed Nixon, sharply. "It's not safe." Keeping a watchful eye on the hay, he backed slowly towards the trap-door.

"What are you going to do?" asked Maud, in an alarmed whisper, backing also.

"I'm going down too," replied the District Officer, briefly.

It was a disappointing reply, but the strategy seemed sound.

"You'll come back when you've got a gun?" asked Maud.

"I may do," said Nixon, non-committally.

At that instant, with a last convulsive movement, the hay parted. The pair flattened themselves against the wall as a dark-complexioned face at the end of a long neck protruded from the opening and an injured voice demanded the return of its watch and chain.

It was a voice that both remembered having heard somewhere before, and Maud, going closer, flashed her lamp hurriedly over the features of its possessor.

"Aren't you Mr Podd?" she asked.

The owner of the face turned it, and eyed her balefully.

"That's it!" exclaimed Nixon. "Archibald Podd, the young man from Borneo. M'Whizzle's new clerk. What are you doing here, Podd?" he asked, in a stern voice.

"Whatever I'm doing, which I do not know, Mister," returned Podd, with elaborate sarcasm, "I'm not doing it of my own sweet will, I assure you. I might as well ask you, excuse me, what you are doing here. This is a free country. At least they tell me so."

"I don't want any nonsense," said Nixon, with dignity. "A famous racehorse is missing from the stable below, and I find you concealed in this hayloft. How do you explain this?"

"And do you expect me to sit here without my watch and chain, Mister, and explain something about

which I know nothing?" asked Podd, indignantly. "Don't talk silly."

He rose.

"I am going now," he said coldly. "This hayloft is no fit place for a gentleman. I was invited to sit in it. As a reward I get a severe blow on the right ear and awake to find my watch and chain neatly pinched. This is not the kind of hospitality I have been used to in Borneo, I can assure you. You will hear further from me in the morning. In fact, everybody will hear further from me in the morning."

"I suppose you know I am the District Officer?" asked Nixon.

"We will decide all that later—in the police court," said Podd, warningly. "We shall see what my friend Mr M'Whizzle has to say about these goings on. He is a kind man, but when he hears that my watch and chain have been abstracted upon his native heath he will be merciless, I can tell you that."

"Don't be stupid," said Nixon. "I don't know anything about your watch and chain. But in the meantime the racehorse has been stolen, you've been found here in suspicious circumstances, and you'll have to come with us!"

"If you think I have stolen the racehorse, I demand to be searched," said Podd, indignantly.

"We don't think you have," said Maud, in a soothing voice. "I, at any rate, am certain you have not."

"Thank you, Missie."

"But you can be of great help to us, Mr Podd."

"Always your obedient servant," said Archibald, bowing.

"You will come down now with us to the bungalow, Mr Podd, and tell my father what you know? You can be of great assistance."

"And my watch and chain?" asked Podd, bowing again.

"I'll make it my business to see that you get it back, or one as good," Maud promised.

Thus secured against loss, Archibald's spirits rose.

With a gaiety which was remarkable, he stopped in the stable yard, and with the aid of a lantern exhibited a discoloured swelling as big as an egg behind his right ear.

But except that he had ascended into the hayloft at the invitation of Ryan, and had at once been dealt a severe blow by some unknown person, he said nothing bearing on the mystery.

Ryan corroborated the first part of the story, the size of the bump the second. M'Whizzle, who arrived later in a bullock wagon, having been telephoned for urgently, used all his arts of cross-examination on both men without eliciting any further information.

He departed about midnight, taking Podd with him.

CHAPTER V

It might have been owing, as M'Whizzle stated, to the special interposition of some mysterious agency, or to the unexpectedly elaborate cunning of some gang, that the police were baffled, but the fact remained that a week elapsed and Old Joke had not been recovered. It was a state of affairs, M'Whizzle said, unique in his experience. He could only put it down to the causes above mentioned.

"I expect I shall have to take a hand in the game myself, Podd," he said to his confidential clerk.

"Yessir," said Archibald, gravely.

The office with its rows of shelves, telephone, typewriter, card indices, duplicates, adding machine, its polished mahogany and burnished mirrors, was a new experience for the young confidential clerk. He did not say so, having in his twenty years or so of life learnt the unwisdom of constantly volunteering ignorance. There was something about his face, he had found out, which made people instinctively believe that he knew everything. What it was he did not know. His was no ordinary face. The mirror whispered that to him constantly. He did not like its colour much. The nose, he sometimes felt, was a quarter of an inch too far to the left, the moustache over the thick blackish lips would never trust him

and come outside no matter how persuasively he stroked it. But then Nature where he came from, although bounteous, was never accurate in her methods. Many of his friends in Borneo, he knew, walked about with noses at least half an inch out of truth, and still preserved hope. No, he had met no faces he would change his for.

He had seen some faces, too. Brown Dyak faces up in the Lawas district; the white, cunning ones of Chinese traders who came up the broad river in houseboats full of piece goods and groceries, bartering their merchandise for gutta and beeswax; the softer, rounder features of the Malay bark collectors. Men and women, they used to stare at him, the white child, as if he were something curious, and they in their feathers and loin cloths merely ordinary, talking the while of people he had never known, especially of his father, the wonderful European who had lived for years on the bank of the sluggish river, and had died there. His grave was to be seen, a plain slab of billian. Later on, other white men had come to visit it. He had been produced, naked but for a charm or two, very unwilling to be friendly. He remembered the scene, and how the white men laughed when they found he spoke nothing but Dyak, and was disinclined to make much use of that.

It had surprised and terrified him to be carried that evening down to the steam launch. The men of the kampong, swarthy and long-haired, naked but for the *chawats* round their loins, had stood on the jetty and grinned. Not a woman had turned out to witness his departure. They had never been very kind, the

women of the kampong, and this last act of neglect confirmed the unfavourable impression he had even in those early days formed of the sex. In Labuan, at the school the stoutish head mistress gave him no reason to alter his opinion. Indeed, she deepened it. What school mistresses wore slippers for, when ordinary women were content to go bare-footed, he did not know—or rather he did. Different from the usual half-caste, he reached the age of sixteen without having felt much desire to take up love-making as a recreation. At twenty he was a confirmed bachelor with a liking for the society of men and a taste for adventure, which Labuan was too small to allow him to gratify.

He had now been in his berth a week and was proudly conscious that he was giving satisfaction. Of his employer he could not as yet make much. It was an unique specimen, not to be encountered elsewhere, but Archibald did not know this. He took the Chief of the Secret Police for a European of higher grade than any he had yet encountered, and was still awestruck. It flattered him that such a brilliant being was, while preserving his distance, inclined to be friendly and to inquire after his relations; and in the endeavour to reciprocate he taxed his imagination to the uttermost, drawing touching pictures of his dear old mother up the Lawas River and the inadequacy of her supply of loin cloths, the only garment, it appeared, which she cared to wear. He had a feeling that a man without relatives was not quite respectable.

"One of these days, Podd," M'Whizzle had said in

a fatherly way, "I shall perhaps be sent on a mission to the Lawas River. You will accompany me, and together we will visit your parent in her home."

It was clear also that his master was inclined to trust him, for that same afternoon he had taken him into another room and shown him, after a lecture on the necessity for secrecy, the records on cards of most of the prominent people in Singapore.

As a consequence, when M'Whizzle made the remark above mentioned "I expect I shall have to take a hand yet," and said next, "Good Podd, bring me, if you please, the dossiers of Mr Templeton, Miss Anderby, Ryan the groom, and the Rajah of Tidatau," the new confidential clerk was able to go into the next room and come back with the requisite cards in two minutes.

"Hum," said Lochinvar M'Whizzle, thoughtfully. He looked fixedly for a minute at the small bronze Buddha on his writing-table, as if in search of inspiration. Archibald, in his clean white suit, stood respectfully beside him, his black eyes flashing intelligently, his well-oiled, rather long hair carefully parted in the middle.

"Podd," said M'Whizzle, suddenly.

"Yessir."

"You will sit down in that chair and read me those dossiers in a low voice."

The young clerk took the seat pointed out to him, and cleared his throat. "Rajah of Tidatau," he read out. "Surname Rahman, Christian name Abdul, son of last Rajah; age 35; complexion dark, eyes brown, size medium, religion Mahomedan but drinks freely,

wives six, owns racing stable, bets, gambles, frequents hotels, ran away with telephone girl when 18, but otherwise nothing against him. Finger prints recorded."

"Good," said M'Whizzle, nodding. He made a note in shorthand on a tablet.

"Templeton, John. Profession merchant. Complexion fair, hair and moustache grey to white, age 65. Tall. Thin. Married twice. Christian but not strict. Owns racing stable, bets infrequently, drinks moderately. Otherwise nothing against him. Finger prints recorded."

"Anderby, Maud. Occupation, step-daughter of above. Complexion fair, hair golden-brown, eyes blue. Height tall. Size slender. Age 18. Christian but with no vices. Finger prints taken."

"Nixon, Alexander. Profession, Government servant. Complexion ruddy. Hair brown, eyes blue. Height tall. Single. Age 30. Christian but not strict, drinks bets and gambles in moderation. Otherwise nothing against him. Finger prints recorded."

"Ryan, Albert. Trade, groom. Complexion pale. Hair grey, eyes blue, clean shaven. Height low. Married to Eurasian, one daughter. Christian but not strict. Drinks bets and gambles in moderation. Otherwise nothing against him. Finger prints not recorded."

"We have not got Ryan's finger-prints," said M'Whizzle, thoughtfully.

"No, sir," replied Archibald. He carefully examined the card again, and gave his head a worried shake.

"I shall not touch the case without them," said M'Whizzle, in a decided voice. He stroked his small chin.

"You'll have to get them at once," he directed.

"Yessir," said Podd. He sprang up, eager to oblige. "If you will indicate to me where they are, sir?" he ventured. It was plain from his attitude that he thought they were in the immediate neighbourhood, probably in the next room.

"Sit down, good Podd, sit down." M'Whizzle waved his hand languidly. "Finger-prints are not obtained so easily as you seem to think," he explained, when the eager young clerk had seated himself. "You will need guile and strategy——"

Archibald nodded intelligently, and took a note.

"Where do I get these things, sir?" he asked.

"What things?" inquired Lochinvar M'Whizzle, sitting up.

"The oil and—and the other thing, sir."

"I never mentioned anything of the sort," said M'Whizzle, angrily.

"No, sir?" muttered Archibald, in an uneasy voice. He was certain his master had. There it was, written down in the notes. But experience told him it was unwise to contradict a white man; he might be drunk.

His face did not express these thoughts. It looked indeed so perfectly stupid that M'Whizzle smiled. One had to learn, the smile said, to be forbearing with fools. There were so many of them about.

"You will need, good Podd," he explained, "not oil, but merely a piece of prepared white paper, which I shall give you. You have already made the acquaintance of this man Ryan?"

"Yessir," said Archibald, nodding his head.

"Then if you ask him to take a glass of ale with you it will not cause him surprise."

Archibald shook his head doubtfully.

"I think he might never be so surprised in his life, sir," he objected. "And I should be surprised beyond belief also."

"Well," said M'Whizzle, testily. "What you have to do is to get him to press with his fingers on the piece of white paper I shall provide. How you do that I do not mind. You understand?"

"Yessir, I unnerstan'," returned Archibald, looking mystified.

"Go up there some time to-morrow," directed Lochinvar M'Whizzle. "See me before you go, and obtain your final instructions. . . . Now read this."

He took from the desk a large sheet of blue official paper, which Archibald accepted with a bow, and, sitting erect in his chair, scanned with rolling eye, his thickish lips moving. To his relief there were not many words he was unacquainted with.

"Disappearance of Race Horse from the Stables of J. Templeton, Esq.," he read in a rolling voice. "Inspector Crusty's Preliminary Report. I have the honour to state that on receipt of instructions I proceeded to the stables aforementioned at 9.30 on the morning of the 17th inst. The alleged robbery had taken place some time in the previous evening——"

"He says alleged," murmured M'Whizzle, making another note.

"The stables are situated in a corner of the compound adjacent to the main road, and connected therewith by a double wooden gate. As it was only

17 yards from this gate to the stall from which the horse was stolen and 675 yards directly across a vegetable garden to the other gate of the compound, I concluded that the horse must have been led out of his stable through this wooden gate. The fact that there were no hoof-marks on the vegetable garden seems to confirm the accuracy of the conclusions drawn——"

"One minute," said M'Whizzle. He made another note. "I rather question that conclusion," he muttered, smiling.

"A strict search of the whole neigh—neighbrood," went on Archibald, after clearing his throat, "failed to reveal any trace of hoof-marks anywhere. The drought and the iron condition of the soil were not in favour of such impressions being left. A thorough inspection of the stable from which the horse was alleged to have been abstracted proved disappointing. There were no marks of any sort to be discovered, except a number of finger-prints which are so confused as to be of doubtful value. Only two witnesses have so far been examined, these being the only two who seemed likely to throw any light on the alleged crime. Albert Ryan, Mr Templeton's head groom, stated that he visited the horse alleged to have been stolen twice on the afternoon of the crime and once in the early evening. During the latter visit he was called on by one, Podd——"

"There is only one Podd," the young clerk interrupted himself to explain, his eyes flashing with intelligence. "In all these countries——"

"Go on, please," said M'Whizzle in a cold voice.

"—One Podd, an—an imm—immigrant from Borneo!" Archibald completed the setence with a questioning stare, and paused.

"Will you kindly go on reading?" said M'Whizzle, impatiently.

"Podd, Ryan found on investigation, had been engaged as confidential clerk by Lochinvar M'Whizzle, Esquire. In consequence of something which is not yet very clear, Podd climbed to the hay-loft. Mr Templeton and party visited the stable. Ryan accompanied them back to the bungalow. When he returned he went to the hay-loft, and found that Podd had apparently disappeared. Satisfied that Podd had gone home, he returned to his house for supper. About ten o'clock he went back to the stable and found the horse had disappeared. There were no native undergrooms on duty that day, it being a fast day among the Malays. The second party examined was the person Ahasuerus Archibald Podd. This man stated that he was of mixed parentage——"

"Sir," protested Archibald, excitedly, interrupting himself, "this man lies. I did not state this. I said with the utmost distinctness that my mother, so they told me, was the daughter of a Dyak chieftain, and my father, so far as could be ascertainable, was a fine old British gentleman. And this impertinent fellow calls such parentage mixed! It is quite clear, this parentage!"

"Quite," agreed M'Whizzle, smiling at the young fellow's excitement. "Go on, please."

The confidential clerk, after a few more indignant pants, proceeded:

"He, Podd, had arrived the day before from Borneo to take up employment under Lochinvar M'Whizzle, Esquire, and at the conclusion of an interview had been directed to proceed to Lochinvar M'Whizzle Esquire's house. On the way thither, feeling it in—in—cumbent on himself owing to the nature of his new employment to learn as much about his surroundings as possible, he seized the opportunity——?"

M'Whizzle nodded as the clerk paused and looked at him inquiringly.

"—Of visiting Mr Templeton's stable. Having never seen a hay-loft before, he, with Ryan's permission, ascended for the purpose of self-instruction into the one there, when he at once received a blow from an unseen hand which stunned him. He recovered consciousness later, and was rescued by Miss Anderby, step-daughter of Mr Templeton, and Mr Nixon, District Officer. The blow might have been administered by an ordinary club or similar blunt instrument. I hope to make a further report shortly."

Archibald cleared his throat nervously.

"That is the end, sir," he said, handing back the paper.

"It might well have been the end of you too, Podd," said M'Whizzle, with a pale smile. "I should like to see that bump myself."

"You want to see my bump, sir?" exclaimed the young clerk, his heart beating.

"Certainly I do." The Chief of the Secret Police smiled at his subordinate's excitement, and, picking up from the desk a large magnifying glass, beckoned him over to the light.

Archibald bent down and, with a gratified smile, submitted to examination.

"You add a new zest to my labours, sir," he burst out gratefully when the ordeal was over.

"Indeed," murmured M'Whizzle, surveying him, obviously much amused.

"I enter Singapore as your confident clerk," pursued the grateful Podd. "Within a week I fin' myself almost born a detective, and already a centre of much study to the whole police."

The rapidly-growing interest Archibald took in his new employment increased by a leap a few hours afterwards, when he found himself called from the kitchen to attend his master in a small room at the right of the back entrance to the house.

It was a room which, during the first week, had perplexed him greatly. There were mysterious proceedings in it every evening. So much he had discovered. Soft-footed strangers in dirty-hued robes came and went without so much as a knock. He had captured one of them on the first evening after his arrival, a tall bearded fellow in a sugar-loaf hat, and smelling strongly of the stable, but the Chinese 'boy' whom he had summoned to his help had told him in an alarmed voice to let his prisoner go. It was an order, he said, that such visitors were not to be interfered with.

None of the servants were able to give any information about the business of these visitors. True Chinese, they were not interested in anything that did not immediately concern themselves. They told Archibald vaguely that the comings and goings had

something to do with their master's work. It was little enough to go on, and Archibald, full of eagerness after knowledge, had tried to find out more for himself. But a criminally negligent carpenter had made the door without a keyhole.

On this evening there was no need of keyholes. The door-keeper, a Pathan in grimy yellow robes, looked surprised and a shade disgusted when Archibald presented himself for admission. But Archibald knew this was mere jealousy at the sight of such a smooth-haired, white-suited product of civilization. He had bought another watch chain that afternoon. Its end was his only weak point, and to have asked him the time would have been to make an enemy. But he was young enough to take the risk and face the world.

He smiled superciliously at the dirty Highlandman from India, answered M'Whizzle's shouted query in Dyak—plainly his master had been on the watch—and entered.

A pair of dripping candles, hung in frames of coconut-shell from the sweating walls, gave the only light. Round the floor on the bamboo mat six or seven figures squatted motionless. He recognized the stout Chinese landlord from the slums, a Parsee moneylender in a tall black hat, a chitty from Madras, half-naked and very dignified, with a smear of white earth across his forehead. These three, probably with an eye to business, frequented the house and were friendly with the servants. The others were complete strangers. Lochinvar M'Whizzle, in the glittering costume of a Malay minor Rajah, sat cross-legged

at the end of the room, smoking an enormous palm-leaf cigarette. Every other man puffed slowly and unceasingly at the particular brand of tobacco affected by his race. The blend of the acrid smoke with the heated air and exhalations of nearly a dozen perspiring bodies gave a thickness and a flavour to the atmosphere a thousand times more Eastern than anything Archibald had yet experienced.

He coughed vigorously, cleared his throat, and remembering that in the pocket containing his watch chain there was a bottle half-full of eau de cologne, drew forth his handkerchief and saturated it with the scent.

"This is a youth, Podd by name, who has entered work with me," said M'Whizzle softly in the vernacular.

Archibald felt half-a-dozen pairs of beady eyes watching him steadily. He owed three of their owners a dollar each already, and nourished a secret hope of owing them considerably more. But no one, he felt, least of all his master, would have guessed from their demeanour that these three had already had the pleasure of making his acquaintance. Handkerchief in hand, he distributed carelessly a graceful salute around, and turned with an inquiring bow.

"Take this tablet, good Podd, and sit here," directed Lochinvar M'Whizzle, with a dignified wave of his arm.

Spreading his handkerchief carefully, the young Eurasian took the place pointed out to him.

"We are about to examine further witnesses in the racehorse case," explained M'Whizzle in Dyak.

Podd muttered his acquiescence, and, observing his master cast a self-satisfied smile round the greatly-impressed circle, followed suit himself.

"Call Hadji Mendout," directed Lochinvar M'Whizzle in a low voice.

"Salaam."

Lochinvar M'Whizzle, busy with his palm-leaf cigarette, which was not drawing well, watched the stout figure in pale-green robe and voluminous turban squat down in the centre of the apartment.

"*Tabek*, Lord, art well."

"*Salamat*, sit down O Hadji, *salamat*."

It interested Archibald to see the Chief of the Secret Police, utterly at home in these strange surroundings, speak, smile, and smoke at the same time. It was a feat he had never witnessed before; he had resolved to imitate it, when the fit of choking that seized the performer made him change his mind.

"Are—thy—brothers—and sisters," gasped Lochinvar, throwing down the cigarette, "all well—Tuan Hadji?"

"Well, O Lord of the Policemen."

"And Mrs Hadji?"

The fat Malay looked perplexed.

"I mean," gasped Lochinvar, "is the contents of the house of the Hadji well?"

"She is," said the fat man, with an oily smile. "But she grieves also intensely at the ill success that has attended my efforts. Night and day have we searched, O Tuan, inquiring of every syce in Singapore, but no trace of the missing racehorse have we been able to discover."

"Make a note of that, Podd," said M'Whizzle, in a displeased whisper. "Here's fourpence. Take him to the door and hand it to him. . . . Your tidings, O Hadji," he continued, in a louder key, "are not of such a nature to give us satisfaction. But pursue your searchings, I entreat, and visit me again. Meanwhile take this purse from my purse-bearer and depart in safety."

He acknowledged the stout Malay's salute with gravity, and, taking no notice of a slight sound of scuffling and a personal remark or two coming from the region of the door as the purse was handed over, took up the tablet and wrote a sentence on it in shorthand.

When Archibald came back, smiling excitedly and looking rather flushed, he spoke to him again in Dyak, and with an air of indecision picked up the palm-leaf cigarette, put it down again, and turned to an ordinary Virginian.

"Summon the Jat horseman, Binga Da," he said.

This having been done, Archibald found himself obliged to use the remainder of the eau de cologne. The conversation was, irritatingly enough, conducted entirely in Urdu. But Urdu was not necessary to appreciate that here was a man thoroughly in touch with the stable. He wore a ragged smock of unbleached linen, his feet were naked, his long hair unkempt, and legs covered with ill-fastened soiled linen putties.

There was a sharp altercation between him and M'Whizzle in Urdu, which Archibald listened to, slightly scared. Evidently what the man said was

not to be trusted, for his master told him afterwards that Bingha Da was an ill-flavoured wretch who tried to draw a red herring across his track.

It was a summary that Archibald felt inclined to agree with. He did not know what a red herring was until his friend the Chinese 'boy,' whom he consulted afterwards, opened a tin and gave him one, but the adjective ill-flavoured described the situation admirably.

Generally he gathered from his master's remarks, after the room was empty and one could speak the English language without losing caste, that the search for the racehorse had been remarkably unsuccessful, and that he, Lochinvar M'Whizzle, was more than ever determined to make immediate investigation himself.

CHAPTER VI

AMONG the many hardships Singapore people have to put up with is the lack of iced strawberries for breakfast at certain seasons of the year. Pineapple and papaw are always with us, and the banana exhibits eternally its plebeian figure on the veranda-table of high and low alike. But unless one happens to be a Government officer—and this does not happen so easily as, for instance, chicken-pox—there is little chance of obtaining a share of the delicious fruit that comes down daily from the gardens at the top of Taiping Hill.

Strawberries always made Mrs Nixon ill; but it was on the plea of her presence under his roof, and the consequent necessity of additional nourishment, that Nixon had been able to secure a double supply during the past few weeks. It made him rather sought after, and, as Robert, the Kling butler, had often remarked, gave the servants a deal of extra work.

"Robert nothing doing, Robert fat getting, chairs always breaking," Nixon had told him comfortingly. But the dignified ebony countenance of the servant had disdained a smile.

"He hates strawberries," Nixon said to Maud, who had come in before breakfast to borrow a book and, pressed, had consented to stay for the meal.

"A sensible man; I wish I did," sighed his mother, looking at the rosy plateful.

"But Robert hates them for another reason. He fancies himself as a gardener, and a long time ago when he first saw them he took a handful and planted them. He watered them for months, but nothing happened. He hates being chaffed about it. . . . Robert!"

The dignified, white-robed butler left his post of observation on the veranda, and moved softly over to the table.

"Master nothing eating," said Nixon. "Good food wanting. Robert bacon bringing."

The butler went to the back of the screen and brought the dish. The District Officer helped himself, and looked up solemnly.

"Strawberries stopping coming," he said in a grave voice, nodding at the fruit. "Robert always helping."

The butler nodded, a slight expression of pleasure flitting over his face.

"Robert berries planting," proceeded Nixon. "Garden watering. Fruit growing. Insects eating."

"Master, you make fun," replied Robert, severely, in broken English. With an offended look on his face he stalked back to his position on the veranda edge.

"I wouldn't stand it if I were Robert," declared Maud, trying hard to suppress a smile.

"We know each other well," said Nixon, apologetically. "He rather likes being taken notice of."

"He used to nurse Alec when a baby," explained Mrs Nixon. "He told me in confidence the other

day that he thought he'd become much more troublesome since then."

"Oh, did he!" exclaimed the District Officer.

"I agreed," said the old lady, drily. "When Alec was a child I never imagined he would become more troublesome, but he takes after his father, who was a persevering man."

"I wish you'd be persevering after the racehorse," Maud remarked.

"I've been doing nothing else for the past week," returned Alec, defensively.

"Oh, I do hope you've found something."

"Nobody's found anything," snapped Mrs Nixon. "Anything smaller than an elephant takes a deal of finding in the East. When I was in Siam one of the royal white elephants was stolen. They did not recover it for months."

"Perhaps somebody painted it black," suggested Maud.

"They did," Mrs Nixon informed her.

"Then why," exclaimed Maud, eagerly, "shouldn't somebody dye Old Joke black?"

The District Officer looked at her admiringly.

"I never thought of that," he admitted.

"There, you see," jeered Mrs Nixon, with a pitying glance round. . . . "I suppose Mr M'Whizzle couldn't find her a berth in the police, could he, Alec?"

The District Officer seemed to think M'Whizzle could do anything. "I'll tell him about your idea," he added.

"You're not to," Maud ordered. "Such a frightfully clever man would certainly have thought of all

that long ago, and I don't want to be laughed at. But I wish somebody would find the horse. We are all so irritated and nervy about it, life is getting unbearable. Even the cat has developed a temper. My father says he is going to give you another three days and if no news comes he is going to scratch the horse for the Derby."

"He shouldn't do that," said Alec. "Give the police time."

"You can't hurry the East," Mrs Nixon reminded her. "And a policeman out East is about the most dilatory thing in Nature."

The conversation was interrupted by the loud important voice of Robert, whose dignified, white-robed figure, slightly swollen with indignation, drew all eyes.

"Go away!" said Robert again in Malay, addressing some unseen person in the front garden. "Go away!"

"I wonder what he's got there," muttered Nixon. "Nobody I want to see, I hope. It's a hobby of his, scaring people."

He got up and walked towards the veranda.

"Robert angry speaking," he said in English. "Hot day coming, Robert's inside boiling, outside perspiring, draught blowing, Robert sick feeling, coffin making, Robert planting."

"Master must speak to this beggar," said Robert. "Me he obeys not."

Alec Nixon looked over the veranda. Those at the table were startled to hear his exclamation of surprise.

"Go away at once," he roared in Malay. "Get out!"

And he turned, and in a whisper advised those at the table to come and have a peep.

"I never saw anything like him before, and I thought I knew all the castes," he said in a low voice. "Isn't he a rum un?"

Out in the brilliant sunlight of the garden by the edge of a big bed of crotons a small man stood looking at them fixedly. His dirty flannel coat, much too large for him, was a mass of folds and tucks. On his head was a gigantic red turban. An enormous wooden rosary hung like the chain of a Lord Mayor round his neck. Pencil cases, pen, seals and charms were suspended from an embroidered girdle. His baggy green trousers were drawn in at the ankles about scarlet wooden shoes. His yellow wrinkled face was distinctly Mongolian, his eyes mere slits.

"What an extraordinary looking man," gasped Maud. "I've never seen one like him before."

"I have," said Mrs Nixon.

"Where?" asked her son, eagerly.

"At Drury Lane once," replied his mother.

"The most extraordinary thing about him to me," remarked Nixon, "is the fact that when I tell him to go, he won't. . . . Go away!" he shouted again in Malay.

"This man spiks not Malay, master," said Robert. "Him Indian."

"Try him in Tamil," suggested Mrs Nixon.

The butler shook his head. "Him a rogue, sir. . . . He no spik my language when he doesn't wish understand. All he understand then is language of Tibet. . . . He know nobody spik that. . . . Goo away!"

He shook a dignified fist at the garden.

"I think he's a lama," decided Maud, who had been quietly examining the small, amazing figure. "There are mystic signs embroidered on his girdle!"

"Isn't a lama a sort of sheep indigenous to the Zoo?" asked Mrs Nixon.

"A Tibetan lama, a mendicant, a *guru*."

"*Guru*," echoed the butler, glancing at her appreciatively. "Missie right; him religious man; people him much feeding, him plenty prayers making."

As if in corroboration of the butler's remark, the small figure in the garden produced a wooden begging bowl from his voluminous trousers, and, holding it before him, began a loud, unearthly, wailing chant.

The sound aroused the two dachshunds on the veranda, already in a state of some excitement, to violent frenzy. They emitted a series of short yelps and, as if inspired by a single thought, dashed down the broad wooden steps and moved swiftly across the flower-beds to the attack. It seemed as though they had been uncertain whether the new comer was friend or foe until they heard him sing. They were all decision now.

The mendicant defended himself vigorously with the begging bowl, but nevertheless a distressing sound of tearing calico came almost at once.

In some alarm Nixon dashed down into the garden, calling off the dogs. But before he had gone five yards a lithe, dark-complexioned figure in a white suit rushed through the gate and was almost instantly beside the guru, laying about him furiously with an elegant ebony walking-stick.

The rolling eyes, the dangerously flashing teeth, and the lightning changes of expression in that tawny face under the immaculate straw hat made the new comer difficult to recognize. But Maud knew him at once.

"Why!" gasped Mrs Nixon. "Why! . . ." She began to laugh.

"Yes," said Maud. "It's that young fellow, Podd."

"No, but the mendicant," said Mrs Nixon in a whisper. "The guru! The lama from the Zoo. . . . Can't you see, Maud? It's Lochinvar M'Whizzle."

"Thank you, good Podd, thank you," drawled the well-known voice as the guru straightened himself. "Ha, Nixon!"

"Great Heavens!" exclaimed the District Officer, coming forward rapidly.

The young confidential clerk dashed up again and, taking out his gold tie-pin, bent to repair the damage done by the dachshunds.

"I never dreamt for a moment . . . " began Nixon, in a distressed voice.

"Fierce animals, those of yours," said the Chief of the Secret Police, making a magnificent effort to preserve an oriental calm.

"We feed them on blood," said the other, with a forced laugh. "But I'm awfully sorry it was you."

"As well to be me as any other lama," said M'Whizzle, nastily. "I can afford to buy a new pair of trousers occasionally. A Tibetan lama cannot. You ought to keep such dogs muzzled. They are a public danger! . . . Thank you again, good Podd. Is all well?"

The young clerk bowed delightedly, and, backing towards the croton bed, listened to the further apologies of a particularly distressed District Officer. It was plain to him that the predicament of his master might have been much worse. With such a fierce pair of dogs anything was possible. If he had not rushed in at that moment more than clothing might have been torn. His master's blood might even then have been dyeing that fair lawn. He raised his stick and shook it again menacingly at the ferocious creatures, which at once retreated up the veranda steps, barking fearfully at him over their shoulders after the manner of dachshunds. They had learned their lesson! Who was that saying 'poor dog?' He glanced upwards again, and saw two ladies in white standing on the veranda. There had then, he told himself, warming, been fair witnesses of the gallant rescue.

Glowing, he took off his straw hat with a flourish. It was a bow more to himself than to them, but they accepted it, and acknowledged it with smiles that plainly were as appreciative as could be.

"You come up too, Podd," cried the elder lady, whom he recognized as Mrs Nixon.

Turning, he found that his master had taken the arm of the District Officer and was making towards the steps. With a thrill of pity, he noticed that the great man was limping slightly. He ran towards him, proffering in concern his ebony walking-stick, then his arm.

Was he hurt? Was he bitten? Oh, no, not bitten! Archibald was thankful to hear his master say that in answer to the questions flung at him on reaching

the veranda. Not bitten! He had merely, he said offhandedly, hit his shin with his begging-bowl in the scuffle.

There was no gory wound to be bound up. Merely a slight bruise on the slender snow-white shin to be treated by the younger lady with vinegar. Archibald, as he watched, felt that he would gladly be bruised to be cured thus, even though the smart and pain of the vinegar should cause him to screw up his face as his master was doing now.

His master liked the young lady better than the old one, that was plain enough from his manner. It was perfectly natural too for him to do so, for she was beautiful, and clear-skinned, with hair like the sun and eyes like the sky.

A fine thing, Archibald felt, to be, as was his master, rich enough to purchase any wife he wanted. He rather hoped that this Mr Nixon was not rich also; for, judging from the expression in his eye, he too wanted to buy the young lady. What would be the price asked for such a lady, Archibald wondered. People in Labuan had told him that white men were in the habit of getting their wives for nothing. And from what he had seen there he did not greatly wonder at it. But this was a very different lady from any he had yet encountered. No parent, he was sure, would dream of parting with her without receiving a very handsome wedding portion. The grace of her every movement was enchanting. Even the angels in the mission school picture-books were earthly things beside her. He wondered what it would cost to buy an angel. Whatever the price, he was sure his master

could afford it. A great man, his master, one of the greatest in Singapore, and everybody on the veranda seemed to know it. They were flattering him and petting him as he had seen the women on the Lawas River fuss a head chief. They told him again and again about the wonderfulness of his disguise. They laid a table on the veranda, and with their own hands brought him strange eatables.

And Archibald noticed with relief that at last he appeared to have forgotten about his accident, and was smiling contentedly.

"Let my man Podd sit down on the floor here," he said. Then Archibald found himself rushed into the very centre of the picture. They brought him things to eat, also, these beautiful ladies, queer-tasting things. Egganbacon one was called. Perhaps the most remarkable was a wonderful berry called the strawberry. Yes, he was acquainted with the European grass called straw; in the Labuan office of his late employer he had seen packing-cases full of it, so he told the ladies, smiling broadly; but he was unaware that the fruit of this straw was so beautiful and so pleasant to the palate. They laughed with joy to see him so pleased, and brought him still more fruit. His master, strangely enough, would not eat it, saying that it reminded him of the cold and melancholy north and destroyed the atmosphere.

Archibald did not know what that meant, but it spoilt his appetite for the next plateful. They were nice, but he did not want to destroy anything belonging to his master. So he left half. When he thought no one was looking he put one or two of the best

berries in his pocket in order to have some for planting afterwards. The spoon with which he ate was silver. The weight of it told him that. He resisted a slight temptation to put it beside the strawberries for planting. The enjoyment of hospitality had, he knew, its penalties, as had also a position in the centre of the picture.

Next came talk about the missing racehorse; and here his master shone as brilliantly as ever, telling all he had to tell, which, as Archibald knew, was nothing, with the air of one who holds back a very great deal. Clearly some of these people were not to be trusted. Otherwise his master would deal more plainly with the subject. Now who was the suspected person? Archibald decided that it must be the old lady. So, when she happened to look his way, he tried to freeze her with a terrible stare.

"My dear young lady," said his master to Miss Anderby, with a curious enigmatic smile, "ask me as many questions as you wish. But I don't say that I shall answer them."

It was a strange smile, Archibald thought, and made his master look even more like the great detective that he was. He tried furtively to imitate it, but without much success, and determined on further practise after reaching home. If he could only imitate that smile, he reflected, what heights might he not reach. Already he had made good progress. A week ago unknown, and this morning sitting at his ease on the most select veranda in Singapore, regaling himself with the fruit of the straw after having effected a daring rescue from dogs. It seemed unreal, but it was

real. Scattered about him were the legs of famous Europeans. There was nothing unreal about them. If his Labuan friends could see him squatting there now they would die of jealousy. In a mirror he could see the reflection of his dark but handsome face grinning at him appreciatively. That of the beautiful Miss Anderby a yard above was smiling, but looked puzzled. Still she asked questions! She would never end her questioning, it seemed.

"Dear lady," drawled his master. "I came up this morning in this disguise as, from certain information —certain private information—I was led to believe that I should succeed better as a Tibetan lama in finding out what I wanted to know than as a common European."

"And did you?"

"My dear Miss Anderby!" said M'Whizzle, smiling, obviously at her innocence in believing that he was to be so easily drawn, "I may say I visited the scene of the robbery, namely the stable. Unfortunately your groom, Ryan, was there. He is a brusque individual with, so I gathered from his conversation, a marked dislike to Tibetan lamas. But still one must be tolerant of the lower classes. . . . I later went to your bungalow, and came away again having collected from Mrs Templeton five cents, two bananas, and a piece of dry toast in my begging-bowl without being recognized. Here, however, you were too sharp for me."

"If only you had not sung," said Mrs Nixon. "The dachs are very patient as a rule."

"It was the Tibetan national anthem," explained

Lochinvar M'Whizzle. "It does, I admit, sound better in the Himalayas than in a low-lying, hot country such as this. But I could not resist the temptation. There seems to be in my temperament, dear lady, more than a spice of the dramatic. With these clothes on—they came from a lamasserie—I was unable to refrain."

"Thank goodness for that!" said Mrs Nixon. "I expect the dogs would have liked the refrain even less than the anthem."

Archibald Podd stared ferociously at her again. Although she seemed not to like his master's singing, she was a rude old lady to let it be seen. He was glad to notice that the others hissed her. He joined heartily in the demonstration himself. His master said:

"Ha, ha! very good!" But his smile showed he was not pleased.

"I hope your secret information proves useful," said Miss Anderby, coming back to business. "We seem to be further off recovering the horse than ever."

"I'll recover it," Lochinvar assured her.

"Don't you think," asked Nixon, "that the Rajah of Tidatau has the horse in his stables there?"

"The last man I suspect," replied M'Whizzle, decidedly.

"Why?"

"My dear Nixon!" The Chief of the Secret Police raised a protesting hand.

The watchful Archibald, noting the irritation visible on the faces of all at his master's expression, resolved once again to practise that enigmatic smile.

CHAPTER VII

WHETHER owing to the vinegar or the attacks of an enterprising mosquito, the bruise on the shin of the Chief of the Secret Police grew worse during the next twenty-four hours. Its owner, developing a slight temperature, was confined to his room by the doctor, and Archibald found himself with spare time in plenty at his disposal. He spent the hottest part of the following days in the small bedroom allotted to him at the top of the house, busying himself with reading the paper, polishing his teeth, watering the strawberries, and practising the smile. From this retreat, when the sun was sinking and the air had grown cooler, he came forth late one afternoon and sauntered into the town.

It was a mighty place, owned, folk said, by the Chinese and Roman Catholic communities, but obviously possessed by a multitude of young men, varying in colour from ebony to plain white, and of about the same age as himself. There were thousands of these young men about, driving round the broad red laterite roads in rickshas behind the padding feet of half-naked, sweating Chinese pullers, congregated thick on the side walks, thicker in the bars of the hotels. As yet Archibald did not know any of them. From their keen eyes he felt that they recognized him

for a stranger, and often found himself tingling uncomfortably.

He wandered on to a big green that ran alongside the harbour, divided from the shallow water by a low sea-wall and a road lined with casuarinas. Here a hundred Chinese nonyas took the air, driving to and fro in glittering motors. Bareheaded, their glass-smooth hair a pincushion of ornaments, they lounged back, their suet-coloured, oily faces contented and impassive. Carriages and pairs crammed with Parsees and Klings, all of them with their families, dashed past, the harness of the prancing horses clinking, the white fly brushes held by the scarlet footmen trailing in the wind. The dipping sun yellowed the vast green, where hundreds of Europeans in flannels were playing tennis, or sitting at round tables in front of the large red-brick pavilion with glasses in front of them. Europeans seemed as sands of the sea in Singapore. Archibald Podd felt like a hermit crab without a shell, lonely and unprotected. He reflected that he also could hire a tumbler to keep him company. But the big hotel in front of the green looked too grand for such as he. He was aware that those sitting at the round tables on the long narrow veranda would be glad to meet him if they knew he was young Mr Podd from Borneo, but explanations were exhausting in that climate, and he was content to slip down a side street and enter a small but clean-looking house of refreshment which he had already noticed.

There were only a few small tables in the place. The waitress was a Tamil woman with a jewelled nose. She was fat; the size of the place, Archibald

reflected, was against much exercise. She was friendly, abusing in a candid way the lemonade, and strongly advising ale. He took her advice, and was aghast at the little change she brought him out of a dollar. She retired behind the bar, and sank at once into a comatose condition. Archibald Podd sipped his expensive ale thoughtfully.

A dissipated-looking Malay in a white suit and red turbash glanced at him from the next table and smiled.

"They are more expensive here than at the Raffles," he said, confidentially.

Archibald shrugged his shoulders, and, as he had already done fifty times that morning on getting up, gave forth an enigmatic smile.

"You don't seem to mind," remarked the stranger. Archibald noted with satisfaction the tone of respect in his voice.

"Dear-r lady, no, not when I'm going round the town," drawled Archibald.

"That's splendid," remarked the Malay. He spoke perfect English. As usual with Orientals, not a consonant escaped him. Picking up his glass, he came and sat down opposite Archibald.

"I am like you," he continued. "When I visit Singapore, I think nothing of money. It is the best way."

Archibald nodded comprehendingly.

"It requires much money to think nothing of it," commented the stranger, solemnly. "Singapore nowadays is very expensive. I remember——." He checked himself, and asked, "Been long around here?"

"A week," said Archibald. He hesitated. "I came down on tour with the steamer from Labuan to fly around for a little while."

He looked the stranger in the eye, smiled, and sipped his ale, rather vain of his advantageous presentation of the truth.

"Are you flying back next boat?" asked the Malay, a friendly expression on his hard face.

"Dear-r lady, no, I've got a Government job—appointment," Archibald said proudly. He drew out a highly-scented handkerchief, gave his nose a formal blow, replaced the handkerchief, and sat at attention.

"A good appointment?"

Archibald smiled enigmatically.

"We have all sorts of Government jobs," said the other, a flicker of what looked like unbelief showing about his thin lips. "A water-carrier is a Government appointment. And they, too, think nothing of spending fifty cents."

Archibald reddened.

"I am no water-carrier," he said.

"None of them are when you meet them in the town," sneered the Malay.

"I hold the post of Secretary to the Chief of the Secret Police," said Archibald, grandly. He had become more communicative than he had intended, but this was a man that must be crushed at any cost. "Perhaps you," he hinted, a trifle heatedly, "are a water-carrier."

"I am, by creed," said the other, laughing, "but I have not been employed for some years now. . . .

And how do you like Mr Lochinvar M'Whizzle? A very fine man he is, they tell me."

"He is a person of extreme cleverness," said Archibald, cautiously.

"Just now he is very busy at capturing the robbers of the famous racehorse," said the Malay. "I do not suppose you know about that?"

Archibald looked volumes at the wall opposite, and took another large sip at his beer.

"He would not trust you about that," remarked the Malay, decidedly.

"Would he not?" burst out Archibald. "Do you know I am his confident clerk, and everything that he does he trusts to me?"

"You are a detective then, sir?"

Archibald hesitated, then nodded. "As for this horse," he said, "we're not allowed to give any information, mister. But we can give you a plain tip. Many people think that the Rajah of Tidatau has this horse. But I and Mr M'Whizzle do not yet think so. We do not jump at a conclusion. Oh, no! You doan' find we detectives jumping at a conclusion. We work slowly, and we keep on hiding things. We find it better."

The other nodded comprehendingly.

"I am pleased to meet you," he said in a very friendly tone. "I do not know your name," he continued, with an air of apology. "But you will know mine, Hadji Mahomet of Singapore."

"And I," responded Archibald, with a confident smile, "am young Mr Podd of Borneo."

"I have heard of you somewhere," murmured the Hadji, casting a ruminative eye at the ceiling, as if

expecting to remember seeing this new acquaintance in some such lofty position. "We will drink yet more ale together."

Archibald, after taking due care that his glass should be quite ready for refilling, fumbled in his pocket.

"I have a few visiting cards left," he said. "Here is one for you. You may keep it."

"That is a beautiful card," remarked the Malay, admiringly, gazing at it at arm's length.

"One dollar twenty the hundred only," said Archibald, in a satisfied voice. "There's a great demand for them, I fin', in Singapore."

"What does the 'A' mean?"

"I have the honour to offer you my cigarettes," said Archibald Podd, hastily producing a paper package. "You will fin' them good. No cheap muck for we detectives, doan' you know. Up in Borneo Mr Podd is well known, but in Singapore not so. So I have had these cards made so that my best friends can remember who I am."

"Podd . . . Podd . . . Podd . . ." repeated the Malay, in an effort after memorizing the name. "Podd . . . Podd."

"Think of the sweet-pea flower," advised Archibald, his face glowing.

"I will," promised the other. "You must not forget my name either. Mr Lochinvar M'Whizzle knows me well."

"I was not aware of that," exclaimed Archibald, surprised.

"Mention Hadji Mahomet of Singapore to him," said the Malay, "and you'll see how happy he looks."

He stopped a moment, then went on, with a laugh, "Tell him, confiden-tially, confidentially——"

The young man nodded, his eye gleaming.

"That I was coming to see him to give him some very particular information, but I met his confidential clerk instead. You'll remember?"

"Most certainly, mister."

"Now, I wonder if I can trust you."

"Trust me!" exclaimed Podd, eagerly. "Everyone trusts me, Mr Mahomet. Why, sir, do you know that a missionary once lent me ten dollars?"

"Very well, I will. Tell him Hadji Mahomet was passing through Tidatau yesterday, and he saw with his own eyes the racehorse Old Joke."

"What-t!" gasped the astonished Archibald.

The other bent over, clutched his arm, and whispered:

"I was in the Palace on business, and I saw the racehorse being led, decorated with ribbons, into the harem. I knew it by its colour."

"It is a yellow one," said Archibald, in an excited whisper.

The other cast an uncomprehending glance at his working features, and laughed shortly. "Yell—yes, yellow, the favourite colour of all Malay Rajahs," he said. . . . "You promise," he went on, "that you will not forget to mention what I have told you to Mr Lochinvar M'Whizzle?"

Archibald was about to promise with effusion, but, recollecting in time that too great a display of eagerness might arouse suspicion, brought out a pocket-book covered with forget-me-not pattern paper, sucked

the point of his pencil with an affectation of ease, and calmly made a note, replacing when he had done so the piece of special paper for taking finger-print impressions given him lately by his master.

When he left the restaurant a little later he looked like a Christmas cracker, full of pop and motto. Keeping to the middle of the street, he leapt along, his ebony walking-stick flashing. He was making for home and duty straight as the crow flies; but none on that crowded pavement would have guessed that from his beaming face and glittering smile.

He wheeled round a corner in splendid style.

"Hallo, there!" said somebody.

It took Archibald three paces to pull up.

"Mr Ryan!" he exclaimed, when he recognized the gorgeously-attired person before him, the little European groom. "Dear-r lady! How ar-re you!"

He had felt happy before, but this was the crowning touch. All these Singapore people were now witnesses of the fact that he too had friends—one of them a distinguished European sportsman. His eyes, rolling in their sockets, noted rapidly the impression he was making on the bystanders. He shook hands again with great effusion.

"I have been exhausting the delights of Singapore this evening," he shouted. "I thought I had finished them, and was journeying homewards. But I meet you, Mr Ryan, and I find there is one left."

"Let's go in somewhere," said the little groom, shortly, annoyed to notice the spectators exchanging smiles.

A moment later Archibald found himself seated

behind a large glass of lemonade from which two straws protruded. It was a wonderful place, Singapore. The number of tumblers alone in it seemed incalculable. Coming as he did from the Lawas River, where there were only two and a tea-cup without a handle, the sight of the multitude of these glasses everywhere he went impressed him more than any other evidence of the wealth of the white man. But the urging of politeness caused him to cease after a moment his stupefied study of the enormous bar. He turned to the groom with a smile.

"We are getting on famously with our investigations about this racehorse," he remarked. "Mr Lochinvar M'Whizzle is enormously pleased. He is, I assure you."

"As long as he's pleased," said Ryan, sarcastically. "And when is the horse coming back?"

Archibald smiled enigmatically. "I should not like to promise anything, Mr Ryan," he said, with a knowing air. "Not off-official-ly. But in great confidence I may tell you that——"

"Yes," said the groom, bending over, with interest.

"We know so fairly well as almost to be certain, where your horse is."

"You do?" muttered Ryan, eyeing him with great respect.

"We have had our suspicions for some time, Mr Lochinvar M'Whizzle and myself," continued Archibald in a whisper. "And this afternoon I happened to be sitting at the same table as a man whose information is extremely reliable—I cannot tell you his name. You will unnerstan' that!"

The groom, listening intently, nodded.

"The name will come out later—but the information that he gives is quite extra-ordinary reliable."

"And what is it?" asked Ryan, eagerly.

"Later on you will hear," said Archibald, after slight hesitation. He would have liked to share the secret, but was determined that not one should be before him in bearing it to his master. Not that this wizened little groom looked the sort of person to betray a confidence. With his thin face and long slit of a mouth he seemed built for secrecy. . . . Not that he was over reticent either. Indeed, as they sat chatting, he revealed quite a number of facts about his past. He had been a jockey, it appeared. He talked of stakes and cups and bookies and odds and a number of other mysterious things of which Archibald had never heard. Clearly a man who knew every trick about the horse-racing business; a cunning man, not likely to give away much, not even finger-prints. Archibald remembered now that this was the man whose finger-prints he had to get. He wondered how he should manage it.

"Concerning this racehorse," he said, when the ex-jockey had come to the end of an obscure statement about somebody in the Oaks and the pulling of a horse . . . "No, sir, I 'gree it was not kind to dumb animals to do what you said he done to the horse under the oaks; but it is so long ago that it don't concern me much. What I'm worrying about, dear lady, is your horse, Old Joke I think you call it?"

The groom nodded.

"We are getting on splendidly with the case, Mr

M'Whizzle and me. And I have information here in one of my pockets that will make those concerned sit up, I can assure you. . . . But we are puzzled over one little matter, Mr Lochinvar M'Whizzle and I."

Archibald paused, and looked at the groom significantly.

"Yes?" said the groom.

"You, Mr Ryan," said Archibald, impressively, "are the missing link."

He had come to the conclusion that he could not partake of his friend's hospitality and at the same time get his finger-prints by stealth. In any case, he felt, the groom was too wide awake for such an enterprise to meet with success. He looked at him, and trembled to note a distinct expression of anger in his thin face.

"My dear-r man-n," he said, soothingly, holding up a dark and slender hand.

"This is about the limit," snapped Ryan, with an angry look in his small blue eye. "So I'm the missing link! If you ask me anything, you and M'Whizzle are very much more like missing links than ever I was or ever will be. And you can go home and tell him so as soon as ever you like, the ugly conceited pup that he is."

"Mister Ryan, Mister Ryan," implored Archibald. "Keep sitting. Doan't get up into the air. Let me explain." He pulled the piece of special paper out of his pocket, and put it on the table in readiness.

But the groom had already risen and picked up his topee. "I'm off," he said. "You'll have to learn better manners before I'll keep your company."

Archibald, somewhat scared, watched him march off.

Half-way down the restaurant he turned, came back, and, picking up the piece of paper on the table, wrote on it "Two lemonades. A. Ryan."

"Give that to the waiter when he comes for payment," he said roughly; and stalked out of the restaurant.

Archibald, staring stupidly at the paper as it lay on the table, noticed with a slight feeling of triumph the distinct impression of the groom's forefinger.

He used the rest of his dollar in tipping the waiter, and feeling satisfied, but a little subdued, made his way home.

The Chief of the Secret Police was now making a rapid recovery from the indisposition caused by the bruised shin, and Archibald, seeking an interview after dinner, found him in the best of humours. The news of the whereabouts of the missing racehorse did not seem to come as a surprise. Indeed, the famous detective as good as hinted that he had suspected the people of Tidatau all along. From his understanding nods it was plain also that he was well acquainted with Hadji Mahomet of Singapore. Hadjis as a rule, M'Whizzle said, were strict teetotalers in public. "You were fortunate, good Podd," he added, with a well-informed smile, "in catching old Hadji Mahomet in his cups."

"He is not so very old, Mister," objected Archibald.

"Let me see," said M'Whizzle, looking a shade put out. "Well, no, not so very, really. I should say about—about——"

"About forty, sir, I am of opinion," said Archibald, helping his memory.

"Say, forty-one," said M'Whizzle. "There or thereabouts."

Had Archibald not known his wonderful master, he might have felt that there was some misunderstanding. But he had Hadji Mahomet's word also that they were acquainted. He felt rather puzzled, but then most of this detective work was puzzling. With his small brow knit he watched the famous policeman, who now squatted Eastern fashion on a mat beside his office chair. There was some deep thinking going on now in that great brain, this was plain to the most casual observer. Absentmindedly M'Whizzle took a piece of palm-leaf paper from his carved wooden case, helped himself from the bowl of coarse black native tobacco, made a cigarette, and began to smoke. The tobacco was of a brand much used by Borneo natives for fumigating fruit trees. Coughing slightly, Archibald respectfully drew back his chair a pace or two.

"Podd," said M'Whizzle, suddenly.

"Sir?" The young Eurasian looked an eager inquiry.

"I am going to Tidatau," announced the Chief of the Secret Police in deliberate tones. "The news you have brought me confirms what I have always thought." He looked steadily at Archibald. "You will be extremely surprised to hear, Podd, what I have to say, but it has always been my firm belief that the missing racehorse was stolen by the Rajah of Tidatau and secreted in his harem."

Archibald nodded. He could not help looking amazed and delighted at his master's wonderful power of dissimulation, having heard him more than once

state that he was certain the stolen animal was not in Tidatau or anywhere near it.

"We have a difficult task before us, Podd," went on M'Whizzle, gravely.

"We?" echoed the young Eurasian.

"I intend to take you with me as assistant," said the Chief of the Secret Police. "I want a man who can hold his tongue, who can be relied on in an emergency."

Archibald smiled and nodded understandingly.

"I should have preferred an Ethiopian eunuch," said M'Whizzle, "but I can't get one at such short notice, and besides, he might not understand my habits."

"Sir," said Podd, non-committally. He did not know what an Ethiopian eunuch was, but felt pleased that such a thing was not readily procurable.

"And," said M'Whizzle, in thoughtful tones, "if you do happen to be doing any shopping during the next week, you might purchase me a fairly good camel, and a tooth-brush not too hard. Tell them to put it down to the account of the Government.

Archibald gave a business-like nod, and opening the forget-me-not pocket-book made a note. He did not know much about such things, but was quite prepared to buy them. However, during the next few days he was so occupied in getting ready for the journey that he forgot all about this last order of his master's. They were days when he and M'Whizzle were behind closed doors for hours together, when mysterious parcels brought by quaintly-garbed messengers from obscure bazaars arrived frequently at

the residence of the Chief of the Secret Police, when Archibald, a queer gleam of excitement in his eyes, foreswore as much as possible the society of the Chinese servants, fearful of betraying secrets known to him and his master alone.

All was ready for the journey when M'Whizzle referred to the camel again.

"Camel, sir?" echoed Podd, making a valiant attempt to look surprised. "You want a camel, sir? Yessir. I'm going round to the Co-operative Stores at once, sir."

"Stores!" said the Chief of the Secret Police in a disgusted voice. "They don't keep them. You'll have to go into the native bazaar, among the Arab traders, and pick one up there. And you'll have to see about his food."

"Food? It is an animal, then?" exclaimed the young Eurasian, in some astonishment. "I thought it was a female garment."

"I did not say camisole," said M'Whizzle, tartly. "I said camel. Yes, it is considered by the Western nations to be an animal," he continued, a smile flickering about his lips, "but I believe the 49th Chatee of the Mongolian Empire classes it as reptilian on account of its long neck. But that need not concern you, good Podd. The thing is to obtain one."

Archibald nodded uneasily, and ran through his natural history.

"Is it——" he asked, and hesitated. "Is it one of those high creatures with a humped back that you see on the photographs of the infant Moses taken while sound asleep among the bullrushes?"

"Not exactly on the photographs, my good Podd," explained M'Whizzle, wearily.

"And is it necessary, sir, to take such an alarming animal to Tidatau?" inquired Archibald. "All the peoples will be looking at us, sir!"

"Those who are on service with me," said the Chief of the Secret Police in a stern voice, "are required to display unquestioning obedience. I have decided that a camel is necessary. That ought to be enough for you. Please be so good as to obtain the animal without any further delay whatever. You can't be expected to understand everything, good Podd," he went on, relenting when he saw his subordinate's hurt expression. "But I may tell you that my object when arriving at Tidatau *is* to be looked at, *is* to be observed of all observers, so that the news of our arrival will be borne quickly to the Palace, and we shall be invited thither to display ourselves. And now, enough. Go!"

He dismissed the young clerk with a final wave of the hand, and resumed his contemplative attitude on the mat.

CHAPTER VIII.

So offhanded had been the manner in which his master had ordered a camel that Archibald went to bed convinced that Singapore must be full of them, and that defective eyesight alone was the cause of his not having seen any about the streets. But a visit to the bazaar next morning speedily undeceived him. Not only were there no camels visible, but nobody, it appeared, had ever heard of such an animal. For the information of a suspicious dealer he made a rough sketch of one from memory, and was promptly told to leave the shop, and not try silly jokes on busy men. A Chinese firm to whom he wrote replied by letter stating that they did not understand what he wanted, and besides, had none in stock. Inquiries among his few friends proved equally useless, and at last, in desperation, he resolved to forget about Ryan's inexplicable conduct at the restaurant and seek his advice as a man who had travelled in India and elsewhere, and had a bowing acquaintance, if one could judge from his conversation, with every animal that went into the Ark.

He had put on a clean white suit, his straw hat had an elang-elang flower in the band of it, and he carried lemon kid gloves and an ebony walking-stick; but in spite of all these preparations he walked along the shady avenues of Tanglin to the stable entrance

of the Templeton's bungalow with inward trepidation, and pulled the handle of the bell as respectfully as he would have that of Government House itself.

It was three o'clock, and the tropical sun had driven most living things under shelter. The heat was stifling. A dirty Malay stable boy in a red cotton sarong answered the bell, and directed him to a small bungalow bright with bougainvillea, that lay some distance down the road, where the ex-jockey, he said, would be found drinking tea.

There was no bell here, merely a polished knocker. Reverent applications of this failed to bring an answer. There was evidently no one within. Archibald began to feel bolder. By standing on tip-toe and craning the neck he could see round the side of the bungalow. He saw part of a veranda. In the fence at his left was a high gate leading into what, judging from the row of billowing lingerie, was a place for drying clothes. And, as he looked, a slender brown hand at the end of a bare plump arm appeared above the top of the fence, holding a wooden clothes-peg. Deeply interested, he watched the hand disappear. A moment later, owing to decisive action on the part of a clothes-prop, the line of garments rose at least two feet.

No further proof that somebody was on the other side of the fence was needed by the budding detective. With a preliminary pull at his jacket back, and a shake of each carefully trousered leg, Archibald emitted a loud, sustained cough, and waited on the doorstep, smiling tremulously, yet confidently.

Another line of flapping clothes was elevated. He coughed again, clearing his throat in true Malay

fashion. Eight dainty henna-stained fingers appeared, gripping the top of the fence. There was a scraping noise. He saw a pink cotton sunbonnet, and under that a low dark forehead, and a pair of large black, curious eyes.

"Oh!" said a voice in surprise. The head disappeared.

Half a minute had passed before it appeared again.

"I've just obtained a box to stand on," said the young woman. "You want?"

The smiling Archibald lifted his hat with a flourish and bowed low.

"I'm young Mr Podd of Borneo," he introduced himself.

"That may be," said the young woman, smiling. "But you've come for something?"

"Do not you know me?" asked Archibald, a look of amazement on his face. "Has not your father told you about me?"

"My father?"

"You are Miss Ryan, are not you?" asked the young clerk; and then, remembering his manners, he bowed again, and said: "Have I not the honour and extreme pleasure of addressing Miss Ryan?"

"You are a polite youth," said the young lady. If Archibald was any judge, her voice sounded admiring.

"Who would not be so, dear-r lady?" he exclaimed, daringly.

"Miss Nelly Ryan," she said, looking at him.

"But there is only one of you?" ventured Archibald.

"There could not be more, could there?"

"Not except amongst the angels," said Archibald, delightedly. He lifted his straw hat again, and replaced it at an angle which indicated confidence and a certain amount of dash.

"So you're from Borneo," murmured the young lady. "That's where the wild man comes from." What she was looking so mischievous at he could not as yet understand. "Yes, my father did tell us of a young man from Borneo."

"I thought he would," said Archibald, in a triumphant voice. "He knows me well. Mr A. Archibald Podd of the Secret Policemen."

"Father said he had escaped from Borneo."

"Escaped, dear-r lady?" echoed Archibald.

He stood blinking. In the dazzling sunlight she looked very sweet and innocent, but for some reason he was beginning to feel rather nervous of her.

"No! No! No!" he said, shaking his head. "I did not have to escape."

"They did not think you worth keeping, perhaps?" asked the maiden, with the air of one trying to acquire information.

The confidence with which Archibald began the interview was somehow rapidly evaporating. Evidently this Miss Ryan had so far failed in a disappointing manner to understand him as she should. With the object of preventing any further errors, he produced his pocket-book and, looking extremely dignified, handed her his card.

"And what is this for?" she asked, twirling it in her fingers.

"I have had those printed to remind my friends who I am," explained Archibald.

Miss Ryan at once held out the card to him.

"Will you not read it?" he asked, gulping slightly.

"Oh, no, this is for your friends. I see you for the first time this afternoon."

"But it is for others beside my friends," cried the disconcerted Archibald. "Do read it! You must read it!"

"Must," said the young lady. She opened her fingers, and the card fell in the dust on the path beside him.

He stooped and picked it up, tears of offended pride in his eyes, but, curiously enough, with no feeling of dislike towards the offender. He felt ashamed and guilty of something. He did not know exactly what.

"I am sorry, miss, you will not read my card," he said in a humble voice. He raised his hat slightly. "Good-bye."

Feeling very miserable, he turned and walked away. It was after quite half a minute and he was some yards along the path when he heard her call out in a softer voice: "Mr Podd!"

She wanted him to come back. For an instant pride struggled fiercely, but he turned.

"I have changed my mind," said Nelly Ryan. "I should like to read your card."

He saw she was holding out her hand. Tears of gratitude were in his eyes as he seized and shook it. And when she took the card and did not even ask what the 'A' stood for, he felt that there was little in the world he would not do for such a girl.

Destiny, working rapidly, at once provided an occasion. There came from inside the paling a spasmodic grunting, and the sound of pattering hoofs. Wings flapped as chickens fled, clucking terrorstruck. Nelly looked over her shoulder.

"I must go," she said. "The pigs have got out."

She disappeared, and Archibald stood gazing at the place she had occupied. It looked cheerless and empty. Inside the fence the noise grew. The farmyard had evidently become a circus. A line of clothes vibrated and fell, and a prop was knocked from under it. A moment later she appeared again above the fence, flushed and panting.

"Oh, you have not gone," she gasped. "Mr Podd, the pigs have got out. Will you come and help? I cannot manage by myself."

In a flash Archibald had thrown his hat, stick, and gloves over the fence, and himself at the fence, and was trying to climb over it. He fell, dusted himself, tried again. After a desperate minute, the only pleasant memory left of which was the feel of his new friend's soft bare arms round his neck as she assisted him, he was standing breathless and perspiring inside the paddock. He noted with great irritation that two enterprising fowls had already seized his lemon-kid gloves, and, seeking solitude, were being chased to death by their comrades. Three of the escaped pigs had gathered round the straw hat, and were enjoying a hearty meal.

It was difficult to decide which to rescue first. After a second's hesitation he chose the hat. Half the brim was already missing, but otherwise it did not seem

much damaged. One glove had apparently been swallowed; the other when retrieved was damaged beyond repair. He put it regretfully into his pocket, and turned to the chase. Pigs were, he knew, notoriously disinclined to go through gates. These were six of the most athletic pigs he had ever encountered. They pranced round the paddock like ponies. After being upset three times by one of them, which, evidently mistaking him for a hoop, persisted in attempting to jump through his legs, he picked up his ebony walking-stick, intensely irritated. He had broken it before he at last succeeded in getting the pigs back to their sty. The look of gratitude she gave him was worth the stick and the gloves and straw hat as well.

Then came tea on the veranda and the experience, new to him, of sitting in a comfortable chair and being waited on by somebody. No one had ever brought him tea until he came to Singapore. He had been accustomed to make his own on the occasions when there was any. Now mems even had waited on him—on the District Officer's veranda. But on that occasion he had sat on the floor and felt himself merely a minor detail. Here he was in the chair of honour, and, moreover, this lady was not so awe-inspiring as were Mrs Nixon and Miss Anderby. She was, he saw, Eurasian like himself, but lighter in colour than any Eurasian girl he had met so far. She had changed her working frock for a light pink gown, and looked more beautiful than ever. He had always thought tea an over-rated drink, but she must have had some special way of making it, for now on this veranda it tasted like nectar.

"This is a most delightful veranda," he told her. "See the yellow flowers, coming in to look at it."

"There are alamandas," said Nelly Ryan. "They are verree pretty, I think."

"Oh, yes." He looked at her, longing to be impressive, but rather feeling doubtful. He decided to run the risk.

"This is a prettier veranda than Mrs Nixon's, where I was discussing breakfast some mornings ago," he remarked.

Nelly gave him a look of surprise.

"You?" she said.

"We had a very fine breakfast, I assure you. Me, Mr and Mrs Nixon, Miss Anderby, Mr M'Whizzle, and myself."

"You were invited there to breakfast?"

"Mr M'Whizzle and I happened to be casually passing on business," explained Archibald, avoiding her eye. "We were asked to enter, and we entered thereupon. There was straw fruit for breakfast, an extremely eatable fruit. I had a share of it. Do you know the straw fruit?"

"No, I do not," replied Nelly.

"There are also two fierce dogs," continued Archibald, reminiscently. "They were at their fiercest that morning, but I subdued them."

"Miss Anderby told me about that," Nelly said in a dry voice.

"She told you?" exclaimed Archibald, surprised.

"Oh, yes."

"You know her, then?"

"I see her every day," explained Nelly, filling his

cup again. "I go to her in the morning to work, helping her with her sewing."

"I did not know that," muttered Archibald, at once regretting his version of the breakfast. He felt her eye on him, and quailed.

"She told me quite a different story," said Nelly. "She said that the dogs were very small and not fierce, and that you ran in to help Mr M'Whizzle, not that you were passing casually. Now I wonder which is true."

Archibald looked as if he could have informed her. Blushing up to the eyes, he gazed tongue-tied out into the pleasant garden with the object of finding a fresh topic of conversation, the present one having suddenly gone stale.

At the sight of his embarrassment, Nellie gave a delighted giggle.

"Oh, Mr Podd, Mr Podd!" she muttered, tolerantly. . . . "But I'm sorry Mr M'Whizzle was not bitten."

"You're sorry?" exclaimed Archibald, finding his tongue. "Why?"

"I've never seen him," she said, frankly. "But I don't like him. And my mistress does not either. He seems so foolish and conceited."

"But he is not," declared Archibald, indignant that anyone should think so of his master. "He is a most ingenious! To illustrate——"

Certainly when he came up that afternoon in search of a camel he had not intended to tell so much of his business. But in order to illustrate the great qualities of his master it had become necessary to do so, and he was not the one to hesitate.

With an expression of growing amazement on her face, Miss Ryan heard where the missing Old Joke was, and of the ingenious scheme concocted by the Chief of the Secret Police for recovering him. For Archibald, mindful of two falls already that afternoon, restrained a mighty desire to claim at least partial credit for that masterly scheme, and represented himself merely as an earnest and very capable assistant.

She was, he gave her to understand, the only person in the secret except the two principals. She was to treat the information given her as confidential.

"But you must let me tell Miss Anderby," she said, when he had ended. "She will die of laughing."

"Laughing!" exclaimed the horrified Archibald.

"It is such—such a verree clever plan, so like what I have heard of Mr M'Whizzle," gasped Nelly.

Her amusement mystified and slightly displeased Archibald, and, Mr and Mrs Ryan coming in soon afterwards from a tea-party at a neighbour's, he made himself ready for departure.

Mrs Ryan, much darker in complexion than her daughter, was pleasant enough to him, but it was plain from the groom's coldish demeanour that the incident at the restaurant was still rankling, and he would receive no help from that quarter in his search for a camel. Indeed, Ryan stated gruffly enough that such an animal was almost unknown in Singapore, the only one in that city being in the zoological sheds at the Botanical Gardens.

Archibald walked thoughtfully down the road.

CHAPTER IX

It seemed to Archibald that the only thing left for him to do was to crawl back home and confess his failure to execute the first really important commission the Chief of the Secret Police had given him. After the confidence exhibited by his master, this apparent famine of camels in Singapore was very puzzling. Could it be that Mr M'Whizzle, who he had never known before to be mistaken, was mistaken now? Or was it that people generally, grown jealous of the high position which he, Archibald, was attaining in the Government service, had entered into a tacit conspiracy to prevent his obtaining a camel? There were such things as boycotts and, now he came to think of it, all those from whom he had tried to buy a camel had worn a suspiciously smiling appearance as though they were participators in some secret joke. They had also said to a man that there were no camels in Singapore, whereas Ryan had admitted that the Botanical Gardens held a specimen.

The whole business was sufficiently mysterious, enough to make any half-caste, let alone one from the wilds of Borneo, scent treachery. Archibald squared his shoulders and turned up a side lane. He had come to the determination that he would not confess to failure without a final struggle, and that as a pre-

liminary preparation for this struggle he would repair to the Botanical Gardens himself, to find out with his own eyes exactly what a camel was.

Except on band nights these Gardens were the one place in Singapore where solitude might be found always. Archibald wandered in the late sunshine through miles of well-kept gravel walks edged with shaven turf, at the back of which stood luxurious thickets of carefully-tended trees, each tree decorated with a large label. He had not known before that there were so many kinds of trees. Some he recognized with pleasure as growing in the Borneo forest, but in Singapore their names, according to the labels, were different. He was not surprised. It was an English custom, he knew, to give everything a long name. Before he had been annexed by the missionaries, he had been called amongst the tribe by a name very much shorter than Ahasuerus Archibald Podd. The name was 'Damit,' which in Malay means 'little one.' His English father had ejaculated it on first seeing him, and, as he was a small-sized infant, the name had stuck.

Pondering these philological matters, he walked slowly along. A Malay gardener or two passed him, eyeing his damaged straw hat with suspicion, but made no comment. Directed by small finger-posts at every cross-road, he found the zoological sheds without difficulty. It was a very small collection, containing a porcupine or two—he knew these animals, having seen the Dyaks on the Trusan bring them in at night, the dogs, most of them adorned with quills about the region of the nose, following close behind—

a honey bear, a tiger of dismal appearance, and the camel.

All the animals except the camel, which, he noted comtemptuously, was labelled *camelus dromedarius*, probably with the idea of misleading the more ignorant of the public, were in cages with padlocked doors. The camel occupied a shed and yard with a gate secured by an ordinary latch. Evidently it was a tame animal, an animal to be trusted. It looked friendly, if perhaps a trifle aloof. He approached, leant on the fence, and studied it. A marvellous creature with a noble hump, a moist eye and sensitive ever-working nostrils! It seemed to be smelling him. It approached. He drew back hastily, and then, remembering that he was a man and a policeman, stooped, plucked a small bunch of grass, and, with a soothing word or two in Malay, offered it. The camel, bending its proud head, smelt the grass, and his straw hat. It selected the latter, and, sitting down in the middle of the yard, began a leisurely meal.

Archibald spoke to it in Malay, but it evidently did not understand the language, otherwise it would not have looked so pleased. The smell of hair oil was what tempted the animal, he reflected. Evidently it had been deprived of fats for some time. That he had a legitimate grievance against the authorities because of this camel's action could not be doubted. On the other hand, beside him hung a placard which stated that visitors feeding the animals were liable to prosecution. Plainly he had transgressed the rules. People, let alone policemen, had to proceed cautiously in Singapore.

Raging inwardly, but feeling very undecided, he watched his hat disappear even to the ribbon. The animal evidently was not very dainty. He remembered his master's instructions that food was to be purchased for the camel. If they secured such an animal as this, a purchase of special food would certainly not be necessary.

Archibald had become fairly certain in his own mind by this time that there were not at any rate *many* camels in Singapore. Such an animal was too big to be kept inside a house. Kept outside, nobody could have missed seeing one somewhere or other.

He heard the squeak of a barrow and, looking up, saw a man wheeling one along the gravel path. From an unobtrusive position he watched the man open the gate of the yard, deposit within a load of hay, pat and handle the camel familiarly, and without the slightest sign of fear.

Pondering all this, Archibald retreated to a still more unobtrusive position behind a disused door at the back of the tiger's cage. From here, later on, he heard sound of the bell that announced the closing of the gardens for the night. From here, trembling and scarcely daring to breathe, he watched a couple of keepers bring a piece of buffalo meat and, opening the door of the cage, fling the tiger his supper.

They were big Malays, fierce enough, he felt, to have flung him into the cage along with the meat had they found him. No other visitors came after their departure. The tiger's growls grew more and more amiable as the meal proceeded, and at last merged into a sort of comfortable purring.

The porcupines in their cages rattled and rustled faintly. The head of the camel with its moving jaws was visible in the distance. They were still moving when the short twilight deepened into night.

It was a dark night that had arrived, but not dark enough for objects to become unrecognizable. The animal that ran over him as he lay behind the door was, he decided, some kind of skunk, a bad kind of skunk. It seemed to be after a snake, and, judging from a hiss and scuffle in the near distance, it at once effected a success.

Archibald crawled out from behind the door, and arose stiffly. There were swarms of mosquitoes about the silent cages, but he, like the animals, had an almost invulnerable skin. He could see very well in spite of the darkness. He felt at home in it, and strangely free from any tremors. In the tribe, when he was a child, creeping forth at night and stealing other people's buffaloes was a common hobby. It seemed to him that a camel was easier to handle than a buffalo.

He had decided that he was morally justified in annexing the camel, as it was only by this means that he could take his straw hat home. That the Chief of the Secret Police would approve his conduct he had more than a slight doubt. But no harm could come of that, because, as the camel was being taken from purely just and unselfish motives, it was quite unnecessary to let anyone know where he got it. He opened the gate and went boldly into the yard.

The animal had ceased munching, and was asleep. He unhooked the halter from the side of the door, and

hitched it into position. The camel rose unbidden. Evidently it was an animal accustomed to a master who kept late hours. It tamely suffered itself to be led out of its yard and, a tall ghost, followed Archibald through the Gardens. They came to a gate. The night-watchman, in accordance with the rules of his trades-union, was fast asleep. Archibald and the camel, which was now beginning to snort disconcertingly, emerged into the pitch-dark road and turned towards the town.

During the next breathless half-hour, he was called upon to display his skill in woodcraft. The essential was to keep as well out of the light as possible. He accomplished this at first without much difficulty, being aided by fields and open gardens, but as he neared the town bungalows and lamp-posts grew thicker, and detection seemed unavoidable. He had a tale ready for anyone that should question him, that the camel had been suddenly taken ill and was on the way to see a doctor. It was a tale, he recognized, altogether too romantic for belief.

He hesitated, and then turned down the side lane leading by the Templeton's bungalow. Houses were fewer on that route than on the more direct one, and he might have a better chance. Lights were burning in the Ryan's bungalow, and somebody was playing the piano, but the stables were dark and seemed absolutely deserted. As he passed the big gate somebody crept out of the shadow and accosted him in Dyak. With a gasp of astonishment, he recognized his master.

The Chief of the Secret Police approached, clanking

as he walked. Archibald's eyes, accustomed to the darkness, noted that he wore a gorgeous uniform, and that beside him trailed a sword. It was a blood-thirsty-looking uniform, suitable enough for a large-sized brigand, but on a person of the size and shape of Lochinvar M'Whizzle as incongruous as war-paint on a boiled egg. Its effect it had on the temperament of the wearer was remarkable. His bearing was war-like. His voice had grown ferocious.

"What is that you've got on the end of that string?" he demanded, peering into the gloom.

"A camel, sir, so my information leads me to believe," replied Archibald, non-committally, then added: "That is, I mean, sir, that is the lesson I learn from its photographs."

"Ha! A camel," muttered M'Whizzle, drawing closer. "One hump only, I observe," he added in a discontented tone. "I hoped you might have got a two-humper. They are so much more comfortable for riding on. However, I suppose you did the best you could. Where did you purchase this one?"

Archibald coughed and hesitated.

"He was browsing peacefully when I spotted him, mister," he explained, uneasily.

"A stray," muttered M'Whizzle. He took his place next to Archibald. "Camels do stray," he went on, "and most of the wild camels, so my encyclopaedia informs me, are tame ones that have strayed. There must be some Arab encampment in the vicinity. Funny thing I have not been informed about it. Now, quick march, good Podd. We must wend our way homewards."

They stepped briskly down the road, the camel following.

"I have been to a function, Podd," explained M'Whizzle. "I decided afterwards to show myself to the various policemen on point duty. It does them good to see that their Chief is on the alert."

"Yessir," agreed Archibald. He pondered the information. "Every man," he went on, thoughtfully, "is much better for some fun, sir. Did the policemen laugh much?"

"Laugh!" demanded M'Whizzle. "What at?"

"At seeing you, sir," explained Archibald.

"I don't understand you, my good fellow," said M'Whizzle in a severe tone.

Archibald heard his spurs rattle angrily as he marched along, and realizing that in some mysterious manner he had given offence, wisely said nothing.

They now entered the better-class quarter of the native town. Crowded trams flashed by. Arc lights overcame the dense ground mist, and made the streets almost as light as day. The stream on the footway became thicker, but where in a European city the passage of such a strange animal as a camel would have collected a crowd, here people merely glanced up apathetically as they made their way along.

At one corner a Sikh policeman carrying a rifle stepped forward, his eyes blazing, as if intending a challenge, but on perceiving the small dignified figure in peaked straw hat and glittering uniform, he retired with an abashed salute. The flashing of M'Whizzle's sword as he drew it to return the salute caused a momentary panic, and a Chinaman ran his ricksha

into the camel, who at once let out viciously and tried to bolt. The Chinaman claimed that the flash of the sword had blinded him. The Chief of the Secret Police, having disbursed damage to the extent of fifty cents, gave the order to advance. Without further excitement the procession reached the mouth of the slum.

It was very dark here in this narrow lane. Pasty, excited faces dimly visible in the badly-lighted shops told the travellers that their passage was observed. Angry voices buzzed. The note of objection grew louder as the small procession crept along the tortuous way. Suddenly M'Whizzle's hat was whisked off. He drew his sword.

"Keep a sharp lookout, Podd," he hissed. "There is trouble brewing here."

"Yes, sir," replied the young Eurasian from the gloom, nervously.

Evidently these people in the slum, fastidious always, objected to the camel. It was not surprising. He did not take to the animal much himself. It had such a superior air. Just now it was holding its head very high, and jerking spasmodically at the rope. Perhaps it, too, was conscious that its presence was objected to by the inhabitants. At this moment, suddenly, like a ship on a wave, it lurched forward and lay down in the darkness.

Archibald gave a vigorous tug or two at the rope.

"Mister," he called out in an agonized whisper, and then when he noticed his master was already out of sight, in a louder key, "Mister—help!"

M'Whizzle came running back, his sword at the ready. Archibald, hastily shrinking, escaped the point by an inch or two only.

"They've taken my best uniform hat," said M'Whizzle. "There's a nasty murmur about, and altogether I don't like the situation at all. Can't you get the animal up?"

By another jerk or two at the rope Archibald proved the impossibility of the task.

"It may have dropped dead," suggested M'Whizzle. "If so, we will abandon it and cut our way through to my house. He bent down and very gingerly felt the animal's ribs. "No, it still breathes," he announced, with what sounded like disappointment in his tone, as he stood erect. "The best plan will be for me to run the gauntlet to my house for assistance while you remain here. If an attack is made, repel it. Don't have any qualms about shedding a little blood if compelled to do so."

Archibald promised he wouldn't.

"Good," said M'Whizzle, fiercely. "Make yourself as comfortable as you can, and guard especially against a stab in the back. These people are really angry, and mean business. They'll come up to you as softly as snakes."

Archibald Podd heard him tiptoe off up the slum, and at once sank down and, carefully arranging his back, leaned heavily against the quietly-heaving body of the camel.

The discontented murmurs in the shops had now ceased, but the succeeding quiet was even more menacing. As a further precaution against surprise,

he took off his white coat and spread it over the camel's back. Having thus insured his life so far as was humanly possible, he became slightly more composed. A menacing noise, which in his excitement had sounded to him like something being sharpened on a grindstone, he traced to the camel. He had heard that peaceful munching sound before.

A moment later there came the measured tramp of feet. The street corner glowed and grew suddenly brilliant. A small posse of Sikh policemen carrying lanterns, and with M'Whizzle at their head, appeared, marching rapidly towards him. The slum again buzzed like an angry hive. Above his head wooden shutters banged open, and heads were craned forward. From scraps of comment that reached him, together with half a pail of water, he gathered that the advent of M'Whizzle's force was keenly resented, and there were likely to be serious trouble.

He braced himself against the camel, and, happening to glance at its head, noticed with indignation that it was in the act of trying to swallow the last of his master's hat.

Making a sudden dive, he succeeded in rescuing a piece of the brim, an evidence of guilt which he at once exhibited when the Chief of the Secret Police, together with his bodyguard of Sikhs, arrived.

M'Whizzle promptly cancelled the orders he had given for searching every house in the slum. He shook his drawn sword threateningly at the camel's nose, but put it hastily into the scabbard on the animal's attempting to seize it with the evident in-

tention of making a further meal. In obvious disgust, the animal got up and stalked off down the slum, luckily in the direction of home.

M'Whizzle forbade it being taken into the house, being nervous of his furniture, and ordered it to be tethered in the yard. There was a slight draught there, enough, he said, to give any ordinary camel of the desert pneumonia. But this was no ordinary camel. It was a beast inured to civilization. Its depraved tastes vouched for that. The party left it in the act of exhibiting its depraved taste further by gnawing the green paint off the yard door.

An animal with such a voracious appetite took a great deal of looking after. Archibald spent a goodly portion of the next two or three days in cutting *lalang* grass and bearing the bundles home, where the camel disposed of them with annoying rapidity. He also, under M'Whizzle's direction, undertook the difficult task of fitting a saddle to the hump and, in his own opinion, succeeded.

Every morning he scanned the local paper anxiously for news of the robbery at the Botanical Gardens. He felt surprised and rather suspicious that he found none, until coming suddenly into the yard one afternoon, he found a strange Sikh, in watchman's garb, caressing the camel.

On finding himself observed, the man approached, fawning.

"White lord," he said in a timid voice. "I pray you, pardon, O great white lord."

"I am no lord, no white man." Archibald Podd drew himself up. He perceived at once that the fellow

intended flattery. Moreover, it began to strike him that he had seen the man somewhere before.

"I am guilty," said the man, "but I acknowledge my fault. I am sorry you deny being a white man. This makes my being pardoned a costly matter. See, here is money, O noble Eurasian. Plead thou with thy master that my fate be an easy one."

"Darest thou then offer me money!" said Archibald, indignantly. "No, I am a policeman, I am no taker of bribes." He expanded his chest, and fixed the Sikh with his eye.

"Truly thou art as a white man, O uncorruptible," said the Sikh, putting away the money in obvious relief. "Thus have I the more courage to tell my story, certain that thou wilt intercede with thy mighty and mysterious master, the Lord M'Whizzle. Listen, then! I am a watchman of the Botanical Gardens, my duty being to guard carefully the gate at night and see that none enter or depart. But on that evening of which thou knowest——"

Archibald started guiltily. "What evening?" he muttered.

"Nay, do not start," entreated the Sikh. "I admit that I had drunk much gin before going on watch that evening because of an inward pain, and that therefore I fell asleep. But Allah will testify that it was not my guilt but a malign fate that induced the Lord M'Whizzle to choose that very evening to make his round of inspection and, finding me asleep, to creep stealthily into the Gardens, take this, the Government camel, away, and thus prove me guilty of negligence."

"But Mr M'Whizzle——!" gasped Archibald.

"He passed through the streets afterwards, so my comrades have reported, his bearing proud beyond belief, his mighty sword drawn triumphantly, as befitted one so successful. And in the face of all this how can I say that the camel hath died, or bring evidence to prove it hath leapt the wall and disappeared? Many of my comrades will at my summons appear at the Court, and swear to the truth of anything. But can I ask them to swear against the evidence of the mighty Lord M'Whizzle? Therefore I entreat thee in pity's name!"

"I will draw the attention of the Government to thy request," said Podd, severely. He drew out his forget-me-not pocket-book, and ostentatiously took a note. "If thou dost not hear further news within the next few months, thou wilt hear in due course. I myself think that thou wilt hear in due course, so disturb not thyself, O watchman."

He accepted the man's thanks with dignity, and waved him out of the yard. The explanation of how the camel had come to leave the Botanical Gardens had taken his breath away; but the sight of him executing a *pas seul* a little later proved to that animal that he had soon recovered it.

CHAPTER X

THE country west of Singapore from the sixth to the twenty-fourth milestone belongs to the Rajahs of Tidatau. They cannot sell it, and they are bound to look after it. So by two tests at least they are kings. Their palace or astana is at the city of Tidatau, situated on a small river some seven miles from Singapore. Fifty farther away would have been healthier for such fast livers as the last three Rajahs have turned out to be. To a good car on the big west road seven miles is merely time for a yawn.

Quadrupeds take longer to make the journey. A good camel might compass the distance in less than an hour, but with an obstinate animal, always anxious to sit down, the journey would certainly take far longer. It was verging on noon when a small party of three, two perspiring men and an irritated camel, arrived at the last milestone before Tidatau.

The trees and scrub end here, melting into a vast plain of yellow-green lalang grass at the back of which the city, gleaming white amid its bower of palms, spreads out and beckons. Especially does it beckon at noonday when the brazen sun beats down and gives to wayfarers that parched feeling that every wayfarer in the tropics knows. The best hotel, so the guide-books say, is painted pale pink.

The fair sight before them seemed to breathe fresh energy into the jaded travellers. One, a dark-complexioned man in the simple garb of an African negro, walked at the side of the dusty white road, supporting the camel's burden, which appeared to have a tendency to slip round. The other, a small person of venerable aspect, wearing the costume of a mullah, strode doggedly ahead, pulling the unwilling animal after him.

It had been an extraordinary journey, but the last mile promised to be the most remarkable of all. For now travellers were streaming over the bridge that led from the city, intent on gaining Singapore by dusk. All sorts and kinds of men were moving, Indians, Sikhs, Klings, Chinese, Malays. As they passed, they gazed with strong interest at the camel and its perspiring attendants. There went along a herd of wild-eyed Sakai, trotting, strung out by the roadside, furtively glancing at the animal; there was none like it in the Malay jungle, which they knew from end to end. Clad in blue-cotton rags, their women with babies in baskets on their backs, the men with burdens of rubber and rattans, they moved tirelessly towards their destination, the produce-market in the Kampong China at Singapore. Then came a hadji dressed in green robe and turban, with a sparse grey beard and a dignified step, as befitted a man who had made the pilgrimage. He saluted the mullah suspiciously, as one of a breed untrustworthy as his own, and looked the camel over with a knowing eye. Here and there groups of Chinese kebuns rested by the dusty roadside. The smoke of their tobacco

poisoned the still hot air for yards around them. Squatting near their low yellow baskets of fruit, they shouted insults, laughing loudly.

"Hai! Brave man thou art to walk thus. . . . Why dost thou not hit the animal? . . . Look at the old woman in front. . . . That is the black man's wife. . . . Isn't she ugly!"

The last couple of remarks seemed to irritate the gentleman in African garb. He stuck his nose in the air and strode on, glaring.

An Afridi trader with two assistants bearing heavy baskets covered with oil-cloth, stopped in his walk and eyed the trio doubtfully. He seemed inclined to put a question to the hurrying mullah, but a bevy of Malay maidens in gaudy silk swayed out from a side path, and, surrounding him, forced him to show the treasures of lace, embroidery, and tinselled millinery that the baskets contained.

At the bridge the travellers stood aside to let pass a quickly-moving closed cart. The two milk-white, trotting bullocks drawing it shied at the sight of the camel. The high wheels grazed the parapet. From the swaying silk curtains came forth a torrent of Malay invective.

"How darest thou let thy aunt walk the earth unveiled, O African? Are we blind that we can bear such an indignity? Veil her at once or my men shall beat thee to a jelly!"

"She is no aunt!" shouted the man in African dress, indignantly. "Canst not tell man from woman, O wall-eyed, discarded one of the harem? He is a mullah! A holy man from Tibet!"

"Ahai!" There came a stream of giggles from behind the curtains. "And thou, O perspiring youth, art thou sacred also?" asked the sharp voice.

"Not so sacred as the purdah when the woman it veils is withered as thou art," came the retort.

"Well hit, O son of Egypt!"

The silken curtains were flung aside, and the face of an oldish Malay lady of high rank showed itself.

"Marvellous and beautiful! What a face!" sneered the African.

She looked at him, her black eyes flashing merrily.

"Monkey-tongued," she laughed. "But my countenance does not render the bullocks uneasy, as doth thine."

"They are used to it, perchance!"

"Nor frighten this camel of thine as does that of the holy mullah."

"Camel! Thou knowest, then, the name of the animal?" demanded the mullah, turning.

"Ya, Allah, that do I, speaker of coolie-Malay with an English accent." She eyed him intently. "I too have made the pilgrimage and can sift the wheat from the chaff."

The mullah, looking slightly confused, turned his back abruptly.

"We had best move on, good Podd," he called out in Dyak.

"Yessir," replied the gentleman in African costume.

Getting the camel under weigh, they scurried across the bridge and into the courtyard of the hotel.

A camel, resting in the white dust under a shady

banyan tree, munched a dog biscuit contentedly. In the dazzling sunlight in front of the long hotel veranda a mullah walked up and down, blowing briskly on a weird reed instrument. The sound had effectually roused the entire hotel. Green sun blinds were raised all along the veranda. From bedroom windows Chinese house servants peeped forth, calling noisily to each other. A gang of Malay syces, frankly amazed, stood at the stable entrance, their mouths wide open.

Snatches of the excited comment of British tourists floated from the veranda.

"Ah, look at him, beating the tom-tom with one hand and unloading the camel with the other!"

"A Somali, he seems like."

"Yes, we saw the same troupe two years ago in front of the Galle Face Hotel at Colombo. You remember, Ada?"

"Perfectly. They don't seem to have changed at all. I never saw the mango trick done better."

"You have to go to India to see the real mango trick," said a bass voice. "The right men do not get so far south as Colombo. Have you been in India?"

The paraphernalia of the troupe was now arranged. The African raised the lid of a quaintly-plaited rattan box. Two cobras reared their swollen heads. The African, his eyeballs rolling, shrank back with every symptom of fear.

"What a splendid actor!"

"You remember, Ada, he did just the same in Colombo?"

With a slightly swaggering gait the mullah approached the box, blowing on his pipe. One snake

swayed dreamily under the influence of the sound. The other, apparently not of a musical turn, made a hurried attempt to get away.

The watchful African, amid applause, made a hurried dash, and jammed down the lid of the box.

"Of course they have their fangs drawn, Ada!"

"Do they?"

"Of course."

"In India they don't have their fangs drawn. You ought to go to India, Miss Jones."

"Look, he's trying again!"

This time it was the mullah himself that opened the box. To his obvious astonishment both snakes, without showing any hesitation whatever, glided out on to the ground and made off in different directions. The mullah grabbed one by the tail, but released his hold immediately as the serpent turned to strike, and, snatching up his pipe, began a spasmodic melody. It appeared to the onlookers that the music merely had the effect of making the escaped captives move faster. They both disappeared down separate drains with extreme celerity. It was noticed that the mullah, with an air of some dejection, placed a bit of brick in front of each drain.

"A marvellous bit of acting, Ada! He's better than when we saw him in Colombo."

"Much better. All these Orientals are born actors."

"Acting!" chimed in a youthful voice. "I don't see much acting about it. He's lost the snakes."

"But don't you see," gurgled the knowing voice, "that all that is by-play to divert our attention from the mango trick. While we've been looking at the

snakes, the dark-coloured fellow has been quietly busy."

A carpet of oriental pattern had been spread in the dusty courtyard. The African, with a confident grin, held up a mango seed, shiny and obviously the genuine article. He placed it on the mat in sight of all. With his back towards them he scattered earth and spread a dirty cloth over the seed. The spectators on the veranda watched the centre of the cloth rise mysteriously. The African whisked it off and, with a wider grin than ever, pointed to a mango plant some eight inches long.

The tremendous burst of applause made him salaam low. A shower of silver bent him lower still. It was unfortunate that as he stooped a large mango seed should have slid out of the solitary pocket in his white linen African blouse. The mullah, coming back wearily from his music, noticed it as it lay, a glittering cynosure in the dust, and pocketed it with the air of a man who intends to say something later. He then turned to the mango plant which, to everybody's astonishment, had suddenly collapsed.

A feeling began to spread that this mango trick had been performed with reprehensible dishonesty, and that the shower of silver had been, to say the least, premature. The conjurors had, in fact, gone off since they were in Colombo. A whisper that the mullah was an expert palmist and would now sit under the banyan tree, and would welcome a few clients, was coldly received. Those on the veranda went back to their long-chairs. A blight settled on the courtyard.

Archibald Podd, greatly dejected, squatted beside

his master under the banyan tree, and listened to a low indignant voice telling him in three languages what he ought to think of himself. He felt he deserved it all. If only he had not dropped that mango seed! If only he had wound up the mango plant properly!

"But they are such slippery, slidy things, sir, those seeds," he mumbled in excuse.

"I want service, not excuses," hissed Lochinvar M'Whizzle. He lunged out viciously at a large bluebottle which, after basking a while on the camel's nose, was busy seeking a fresh resting-place on his own. "The whole success of our undertaking depended on skilful preliminary deception. And you go and drop that seed out of your pocket! Why a—a waiter would have known better!"

"I'm very sorry, Mr M'Whizzle," pleaded Archibald.

His chief gave him a look of undiluted contempt.

"Take the tom-tom," he directed, "and try to beat up a person or so wishing to know their fortunes. Go through the whole town if necessary. I will remain here under the banyan. You know what to say?"

Archibald nodded dismally, moving off into the sunlight.

"Yabba Dullah, holy one of Kurdistan!"—(pong-pong-pong-pong)—"Yabba Dullah, seer into futurity! —Sits he now in Tidatau!—Flock ye to him and learn your fates!—Yabba Dullah, Yabba Dullah!" (Pong-pong-pong-pong).

The clear notes in the vernacular floated through the still air of the courtyard. Underneath the banyan the fanatic mullah paced to and fro, telling his beads,

unconscious apparently of the advertisement he was getting.

A Chinese butler guarding the hotel fell back, pocketing a dollar. The veranda with its palms and cool iron tables lay open.

"Yabba Dullah!—Flock ye to him and learn your fates!—Yabba Dullah."

The African, conscious of unfriendly glances from the numerous occupants of long-chairs, walked through the hotel feeling depressed. Not a customer to be had here, that was evident! From an end table in an alcove somebody beckoned him. He recognized that dark face under a turbash and, his spirits at once rising, pattered across the intervening mat-covered floor.

"Mr Podd of Borneo?"

"You know me, then, Hadji Mahomet?' queried the delighted young detective, in a whisper. "Hush, I am not to be spoken about. I am in my disguises."

"I never forget a face," returned the Malay, gravely. "And yours is a very haunting face."

Archibald nodded.

"A lot of chaps have told me that they can never forget my face," he said with an air of pride. "But, oh, Mr Mahomet, I am very pleased to see you. You find us in the midst of strenuous activity."

"You have new work, I perceive," smiled the hadji. "Assistant to a fakir! An interesting job! Nothing stodgy about it!"

"No, no, dear-r lady," smiled Archibald. "Not new work," he continued, in a tone of some importance. "I am still Mr M'Whizzle's confident clerk.

You behold me here merely as a side line. But," he added, smiling mysteriously, "a verree peculiar side line—yes, I assure you."

"You've got your eye on the stolen racehorse," suggested the hadji, with a wink. "I know you detective fellows. You never let a thing slip. Clever chaps, all of you!"

He shook a playful fist at Archibald.

"If you find the horse, don't mention publicly that it was me who told you where it was," he entreated, with a smile. "I don't want to get into trouble."

The grinning Archibald gave the required promise.

"And that disguise of M'Whizzle's as a fakir," went on the hadji, enthusiastically. "It is a most wonderful disguise."

"How did you know it was Mr M'Whizzle?" demanded Archibald, amazed at the hadji's penetration.

"I did not know, but you've just told me," said the hadji, coolly. "Well, salaam, and go with safety. It will not surprise me if you get an invitation from the Palace. They love conjurors up there, I know that, and as for Indian fakirs, well, all the ladies adore them. They say they are Nature's gentlemen in a concentrated form, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, very good!" laughed Archibald. "Mr M'Whizzle's form is extremely concentrated, so they will like him muchly. Very good! I go now. Soa long!"

The interview with the Malay had helped him to recover his self-esteem, a task which he was usually able to perform single-handed; and he carried himself with dignity as he walked off the veranda. Across

the stretch of blinding courtyard the mullah was visible. Even to the dazzled eyes of his assistant, it was apparent that an event of a hopeful nature had just occurred under the banyan tree.

Lochinvar M'Whizzle had stopped telling his beads, and now stood in an attitude of courteous attention, engaged in conversation with a middle-aged Malay, whose rich sarong and ornamental kris told of noble birth.

Archibald sped across the courtyard.

"This is he of whom I spoke," said M'Whizzle in Malay, waving his hand in introduction. "My African slave—Noodali."

The young detective stopped short in his walk, and bestowed on his master an offended glare. But after a moment's struggle, better feeling triumphed, and he forewent the intention of handing the newcomer one of his visiting cards—with which even then he was well provided—to prove he was a respectable member of the Eurasian community and neither slave nor African.

"He is clean in his habits and will not pollute the habitation of your most high mistress the Ranee," went on the Chief of the Secret Police, with a graceful wave of the hand. "Rescued as a child by me, Yabba Dullah, from the gutter of the bazaar at Cairo, and carefully tended, he has at length grown into budding manhood and acquired a fair intelligence—considering his low origin."

The African glared, and coughed protesting.

"He may also then ascend to make his obeisance before the Fount of Delight and gaze shivering at the

Hidden Perfection of Beauty?" inquired the mullah. . . . "Haste thou, then, Noodali, O most fortunate of slaves, to make such preparations as shall ensure that no more seconds than necessary shall elapse before we undergo the felicity of prostrating ourselves at the feet of the Morning Star."

Archibald Podd stared at his master hesitatingly. It was agreed, he knew, that he was to act the part of an African slave and be called Noodali. But he had certainly not expected that part of their arrangement to be so emphasised. And what was going to happen next was beyond him. So far as he gathered, they were to be on the move again—towards the feet of the morning star. It sounded a cheerless destination. He would have preferred the Palace—if they were not to be allowed to stay for a bit at the hotel, where he felt confident of making a few really jolly friends.

"Put the stuff on the camel," said M'Whizzle sharply in Dyak, "and don't stand there gaping . . . I have to speak to Noodali in his native tongue," he told the Malay. "He does not yet realize that the Ranee of Tidatau has espied us lowly ones from her high sitting-place and called us thither."

"Africans are all stupid, O holy Mullah," commented the Malay, contemptuously, "though how a man should dwell with so bright a spark of intellect as thou, and not receive from it a glimmer of understanding passes my comprehension."

"The bright spark shall receive further lustre from contact with so eminent a messenger as thou art," said M'Whizzle, bowing and smiling.

It was plain to any eye that he was revelling in his disguise and in the quick interchange of flowery compliments and badinage which were, he knew, the common coin of polite intercourse in the East.

Archibald was puzzled at the number and richness of the figures of speech he heard during the next half-hour. No man could be all the good things Mr M'Whizzle said that Malay messenger was, and survive. But the stolid Malay bore up and walked gravely before them down the broad avenues of Tidatau, not to all appearances unduly elevated at being told he was the Star of the Harem, and the Light of the Council Chamber, and the most savage fighter on the country side. Archibald, looking up once from his care of the camel's lop-sided burden, fancied indeed that he saw a slightly bored expression flit over the man's impassive countenance—M'Whizzle was telling him that his wife was sleepless as a weasel and wise as a mouse deer—but it surely must have been merely fancy.

Ahead, down a beautifully-kept avenue of fan-shaped traveller palms, the white, carved gate of the Palace was visible. He approached it timidly, but his heart was beating high.

CHAPTER XI

THE gateway of the Palace towered above the party. Its topmost pinnacle seemed to pierce the sky. Under that tremendous archway even their soft footsteps echoed gently. Beyond, the flagged paving merged into a gravelled road. They found themselves in a garden full of orange and mangosteen trees, at the end of which a smaller archway gave entrance to a low white building. Beyond was a small paved courtyard partly covered by an elaborately-carved wooden roof and surrounded by latticed, gilded verandas.

A Malay servant came forward and, taking the halter from Lochinvar M'Whizzle, tethered the camel to a ring on the marble basin of the small fountain that played in the centre of the courtyard. The animal, greedily quenching its thirst, was seized with a sudden fit of coughing. With a violent effort it dislodged the goldfish it had sucked up, and, looking a shade upset, was at once led off by the Malay attendant and retethered near the archway.

Archibald Podd gazed vengefully after it. He felt annoyed that any animal should exhibit such behaviour in such a place. It was as if his party were not worthy of their surroundings. He picked up the fish as it lay flapping in the sunlight, returned it to the water, and anxiously studied his master, eager to be encouraged to administer correction to the camel with the nearest

walking-stick if such a thing were available. But there was nothing to be gathered from that impassive face.

Lochinvar M'Whizzle had already squatted on the small carpet provided, and was paying the Malay messenger another series of compliments. He treated the behaviour of the camel with silent contempt, and referred to the unfortunate fish merely to point out that whereas ordinary fish were mud-coloured, here in this paradise they had naturally taken on the hue of gold.

"It is nothing, O Mullah," responded the stolid Malay. "They are gold-coloured when we buy them in Singapore for a few cents each."

"Were I a fish I should indeed be glad to come here for nothing," returned the mullah, inclining his head courteously. "Under the eyes of the pearls of the harem who, I take it, are crowded behind yonder lattices, life in yonder fountain would be one long dream of delight."

"True, O Mullah," murmured the Malay. . . . "And now, I pray thee, holy one, repose thy aged limbs and suffer for once in thy ascetic life the joy of gratified longing to possess thee. Know that within the Palace a repast has been prepared for thee. Rice and flesh mingled after the law of the Prophet, and mixed with the condiments and flowers which delight thy countrymen is even now being borne towards us by the hands of a slave—Behold!"

He pointed to the archway, in which a gigantic negro had appeared carrying a steaming basin.

The negro advanced and, salaaming low, laid the basin beside M'Whizzle. He took off the silver cover with a flourish. A horrible odour at once filled the air.

"Truly the magnificent hospitality of His Highness the Rajah is—something to be always remembered by his humble slave," said M'Whizzle, casting an uncertain glance at the dish. He smiled. Archibald Podd noted without surprise that the smile was forced.

"Thine eyes glint, O Mullah, at the sight of thy native dish," said the Malay in a respectful tone. "I pray thee, no ceremony. Thou hast fasted long."

The mullah's eyes were wavering. He seemed to hesitate. "My favourite dish?" he muttered. "I fail to grasp thy meaning, O hospitable one."

"Knowest thou not the cous-cous, holy Mullah? The dish of those wild beings of the desert from which thou hast sprung, of those who like thee have made the pilgrimage?"

"Oh, yes, the cous-cous," cried the mullah, with an air of enlightenment. "The cous-cous! Delightful! . . . But meat and drink are as nothing to a mullah, as thou knowest, O messenger," he added. "A mouthful of pure water and a handful of pulse suffice for his requirements. The appetites of the flesh are for such as us no longer a burden."

The Malay nodded understandingly.

"But behold how the mouth of my African slave watereth," continued the mullah, waving an enthusiastic hand in the direction of Podd. . . . "See, he can scarce restrain himself. So is the solicitude of thy noble master for the poor, O messenger, not without marked appreciation."

The indignant Archibald took out a pocket-handkerchief and wiped his mouth hastily. He was beginning to hate all this lying.

"Come, Noodali," said his master gently. "Assume without timidity a sitting posture at the feet of me, thy owner, and partake of the munificent hospitality of His Highness."

"I don't want any, mister," whispered the African slave in Dyak. "I'm not hungry."

"Sit down at once," snapped M'Whizzle in the same language. "Remember, to refuse this hospitality would be a deadly insult. It might lead to bloodshed. . . . The African slave says," he continued to the Malay with an uneasy grin, "that surprise at the overwhelming condescension of thy master has robbed him of appetite. . . . Noodali, eat!"

Archibald Podd sat down beside the bowl, and taking a handful of the mess put it into his mouth in Malay fashion, skilfully using his thumb. The taste of the stuff was paralysing. He had never imagined that any food was like this. He would have spat the mouthful out, but, as a society man, he knew that those sort of manners would not do at court. He was aware also that bright eyes were gazing at him through the lattices. Before the bringing of the cous-cous breaths of Eastern perfume had filled the courtyard. Even now he could hear the rustle of silk, low bursts of conversation, a continuous ripple of laughter. He swallowed his mouthful with determination, and, exercising all his self-control, took another.

Lochinvar M'Whizzle, encouraged by his action, tasted the dish himself. His jaws moved rapidly, and he nodded several times at the Malay to signify his delighted appreciation.

"Don't stop eating, Podd," he whispered in Dyak.

"African slaves have a reputation for greed. You must eat this cous-cous with gusto or arouse suspicion."

"I am eating it with disgusto, sir," said Archibald. "I do not know this *makan*. But it is the most disgusting possible. Its cook, if I may say so, ought to be punished severely."

"To those who know the cous-cous, it is a great delicacy," explained his master. "But one has to be brought up to it. . . . Good Podd, summon all your courage and persevere. However hard it may be, we must finish the dish to show appreciation of the compliment the Rajah of Tidtatau has paid us. Otherwise the consequences may be severe. Remember, all Africans delight in cous-cous. And you are an African slave."

"They must be queer peoples, these Africans," commented Archibald. "Had I known all, I would never have been an African."

He paused politely, anxious that his master should not miss his turn of dipping his hand in the bowl. He had noticed him exhibit a tendency to do so.

"It is a dish of great sustaining power," went on M'Whizzle. "The Arabs eat a meal of it before going on a journey, say across the desert of Sahara. They do not want another for several days. Don't stop. You'll find the taste grows on you."

Thus encouraged, Archibald gallantly finished the remainder of the dish. It was one of the few meals he did not feel the better for, but his master was in a worse case if a pale-green complexion were any symptom. There was some talk of performing the mango trick, but the drinking of coffee, prepared, the

Malay assured them, after the recipe of a late Sultan of Morocco, effectually put a stop to the carrying out of this idea.

Archibald retired to a corner and devoted himself to the task of trying to feel better, while his master, still on the mat, twisted from side to side in a vain quest after comfort. Apparently the inmates of the surrounding verandas took the mullah for an acrobat, and appreciated those struggles as much as they would have done any mango trick. Their laughter and excited chattering sounded incessantly during the next hour. After that the mullah grew easier, and, as the air became cooler, silence descended on the courtyard.

About sunset the stolid Malay, who had withdrawn after coffee, came back. Archibald heard him ask how the mullah's indigestion was, saw his master give a reassuring nod, and then, after further whispered talk with the man, get up and beckon in true Malay fashion by protruding his lips and twisting them from side to side.

The African slave followed the pair through another doorway which gave entrance to a dimly-lighted chamber of some six feet square, the end of which was covered entirely by a yellow embroidered curtain.

"Noodali," said his master, motioning him to approach.

"Yessir."

A heavy frown from M'Whizzle recalled him to reality. He was, he remembered, an African slave.

"I am the servant of my master," he remarked in Malay.

It seemed an obvious thing to say, but it was the

best he could do at the moment. His master nodded encouragingly.

"Noodali," he said, lifting his hand. "Hear and tremble."

The young Eurasian was executing a shiver with great determination when, looking up, he noticed a glint of a smile on the Malay's face. He stopped at once.

"Noodali," said his master, impressively. "Behind that curtain reclines Her Highness Ranee of Tidatau, Pearl of Delight, Peri of Wisdom. Follow me, then, in obeisance."

Archibald, after the mullah, sank on his knees and touched the floor thrice with his forehead.

"*Peramba. Peramba. Peramba,*" said the mullah in a loud, reverential voice.

The messenger spoke in gutteral Malay.

"Men say, O Presence, that this holy man from India is skilled in foretelling the future by a diligent reading of the palm of the hand, and at thy command I have guided him hither."

The mullah bowed to the floor again. The curtain shook slightly.

"Deign then, Presence," continued the Malay, "that the hands of those to whom thy permission is given be now exhibited."

There was a short pause, a faint giggling behind the curtain. A pair of slender, smooth hands with polished nails and finger-tips stained with henna were gently thrust forward.

The mullah made a motion to clasp them, but was restrained by a tap on the shoulder. "Nay, holy man," said the Malay, gravely. "A touch of those for such

as thou is dangerous, liable to induce feelings of less holiness."

"Truly said, O wise one of the Palace." The mullah turned to the inspection of the hands.

"This hand tells me this maiden is beautiful," he said slowly, after a while. "Also she is young. A maid of high descent and, needless to say, of peerless virtue. Her past has been happy, her future will be happy also, so I read from the stars—er—She is very much interested just now in a horse—a horse of yellow colour—Can she say that what I read on her palm is not truth?"

The mullah paused, and fixed a mesmeric glare on the curtain, without result.

"The maiden is wondrous fair," he went on in a slightly disappointed voice. "She will marry early, have many children, and her husband will be—er—wondrous fair."

At that moment, amid intense giggling, the curtains parted and the owner of the hands was revealed for an instant—a boy of fourteen elaborately dressed in green silk. The curtains closed.

The mullah got up on his knees, and glanced wrathfully about him.

"Misfortune on these women," he muttered to the Malay. "Is my holiness, then, no protection from their joking?"

"They have misunderstood, O Mullah," said the Malay in a soothing tone. "Pardon their ignorance, O Mullah, and deign to enlighten them a little further from thy wisdom. See, another pair of hands come forth. Methinks that this time they are a woman's."

"They are the hands of Citi Ajar," came in a high voice from behind the curtain.

"Citi Ajar," whispered the Malay, salaaming. "Tire woman to Her Highness."

The mullah bent over the hands with puckered brow.

"This lady is wondrous fair," he said, thoughtfully, after a while. "She is tire woman to Her Highness. She is wondrous beautiful—she is—er—very worried just now about a horse, a yellow horse. Speaks the mullah not truth, O Citi?"

There was a long pause, and the sound of whispering came from behind the trembling curtain. At last a voice said:

"It is true, O holy man."

"I thought it was," said the mullah, a delighted expression on his face. He shot a triumphant side-glance at the gaping Archibald. "Ever since I entered the precincts of the Palace," he went on in solemn and menacing tones, "the shadow of a yellow horse has dulled my spirits. It threatens misfortune to this country of Tidatau."

A chorus of dismayed 'Oh's' came from behind the curtain.

"This horse has the evil eye," said the mullah, warming to his work. "An evil spirit has entered into it. Disaster and death will attend thee, O Citi Ajar, unless thou seek my help to exorcise this spirit. Where is this ill-omened horse? Tell this to me, and I may be able to avert the fate that overshadows all."

The curtains shook again as another whispered consultation took place behind them.

"That I am not permitted to say," said the voice.

"Suffice that it is harboured sufficiently close to the Palace for thee, holy man, to feel its malign influence."

This was the longest speech the voice had so far made. The excited Archibald looked hard at the curtain. Somewhere he had certainly heard that voice before.

"Surely from the holy man, skilled as he is at divination, the whereabouts of this malignant horse cannot be concealed?" suggested the voice, delicately.

Archibald scowled at the curtain. The people behind it were certainly most irritating. All these evil spirits were brooding over them, and yet they would not give anything away. It was enough, he felt, to make anyone throw up the job in disgust. But he was little prepared for the bit of marvellous acting which followed. After an undecided pause, the mullah jumped to his feet and gazed before him as if in a trance. For fully a minute he remained thus, and then he began slowly to twirl. Faster and faster he twirled, his features twisted, his eyes starting from their sockets. Suddenly he fell flat on the ground, raised himself on one elbow, and pointing, whispered frenziedly:

"I see the horse!"

"Where, O most holy mullah?" asked the voice in an awed tone.

"In a field. It is standing!"

At this reply Archibald Podd felt slightly disappointed. He had really thought for an instant that his wonderful master was possessed of the gift of second sight. Anyone could have seen a horse in a field! He could himself!

"Which field?" asked the voice.

The mullah hesitated.

"It is a field," he said jerkily. . . . "I see it—I see its fences—I see its gates—I see its grass—I see——" He paused, and glared at the curtain, as though about to tear its secrets from it.

"But where?" tittered the voice.

The mullah scowled.

"The influence has deserted me," he said in an irritated voice. . . . "But to-night all will be revealed! . . . Now, O Light of the Astana, dwell in safety. I depart."

He whispered a few words to the Malay, who nodded. Signing to Podd, he abruptly left the chamber and walked back to the courtyard.

His confident bearing had disappeared; but later, as they trudged townwards to seek a lodging for the night, his conversation proved that his hope of the visit being rewarded was still strong. The animal they were after was certainly in Tidatau, he said. The woman in the harem had admitted that. She also as good as admitted that the animal was in a field. The obvious thing to do, he pointed out, was to search all the fields in Tidatau.

With praiseworthy zeal, he ordered Archibald to begin the search at once. Only the approach of darkness induced him to put it off till next day, and turn townwards in order to obtain accommodation for the night. And even then he blamed Podd bitterly for not including a bull's-eye lantern in the baggage.

There were many houses in the town of Tidatau, but the inhabitants to a man made it plain that while

they reverenced mullahs they did not care for them as lodgers. The inquirers gathered that another mullah had once visited the town, and had departed by night, taking with him all his hostess's gold ornaments and leaving nothing in exchange except a bad reputation.

It seemed, however, that there was an empty shed half a mile down the river, which had been set aside by the Rajah for lodging holy men. The way to this shed was pointed out with the utmost cordiality by the inhabitants, and at nightfall M'Whizzle, Archibald, and the camel found themselves trudging along it wearily.

It was about the time when Malaya takes its evening meal. The roads were deserted, but through the twilight of coconut groves came the faint chatter of voices as the families of rural Tidatau sat on the rough verandas of their huts and exchanged the news of the day. In the veiled sky above bats were flitting. The rustle of their wings as they wheeled close to the heads of the travellers sounded like the swish of the skirts of a ghost. Tidatau was noted for its ghosts, and here close to the Palace and the cemetery was about the place where obviously they might be met with.

Archibald had seen such awful saunterers more than once in Borneo, and, like most of his fellows, he simply detested ghosts. The sight of them was liable to bring on hot shivers and cold sweats, and, when there were said to be many about, he always made a point of staying at home. He looked shudderingly at the small hardwood crosses that showed now here and

there by the road side. The white rags tied to some of them glimmered wanly. The snorting of the camel sounded louder and more spasmodic, it seemed to him. Perhaps it too had a fluttering heart. With a swerve and a quick beat of wings a nightjar wheeled down and sat in the white road in front, squawking loudly. It was enough to make the best of men catch at his breath. When the next moment there floated out of the trees beside them a slim figure in white, he made not the slightest attempt to suppress a squeal of astonishment and fear.

The camel stopped dead.

"Who goes there?" cried M'Whizzle in a loud, shaky voice.

"O holy man, it is I."

The camel turned round, struggling to get free. Terrified by the apparition, it wished to bolt. But Lochinvar M'Whizzle kept a firm grip of the rope.

"Who art thou, man or devil? Speak!" he called out.

The camel backed, snorting as the figure came closer. Archibald Podd recognized the boy at the Palace. He gasped with relief.

"You little beast; you deserve a good lathering for jumping out like that and frightening our camel," said Lochinvar M'Whizzle in an undertone, much irritated. "I've a good mind to give you one! Hit him, Podd!"

The young Eurasian said quickly that he would not soil his fingers with such trash. He was not afraid, for the boy was smaller than he, but he knew the danger of touching an inmate of a Rajah's harem.

"Forgive me, O holy mullah," piped the boy, bend-

ing. "But my wish to speak with thee and seek thy intercession is urgent. It is at the bidding of my relations that I come thus through the darkness, to seek aid from the magic of the mighty one. Judge then the urgency."

"Nay, do not fear, youth," said Lochinvar M'Whizzle in a gentler voice. "There is no treachery here, Noodali, as we suspected," he remarked, turning to the African slave.

"No, sir."

"Thou would'st have speech with me, fair youth?" inquired the mullah in his sweetest tone. Archibald smiled within. It was at such moments, he knew, that his master was most dangerous.

"O Mullah," said the youth, timidly. "Thou hast left us of the Palace sorely troubled. The women in the house are full of fear. One or two weep already."

"Indeed!" murmured the holy man in a tone of much concern. "Noodali, take thou the camel." He handed Podd the halter, and motioned the youth to the grass border of the road. "Come closer," he said encouragingly. "Tell to me the troubles of thy household. Never shall it be said that a holy mullah from the Indian land refused to succour the deserving. But if art undeserving or deceitful, then beware."

The young Malay shivered visibly as the mullah waved a menacing forefinger before his nose.

"Who am I that I should deceive the holy one?" he stammered. "A youth merely. Holy Mullah! Listen! What thou divinest to-day in the Palace is true. We have a yellow horse, a horse on which my father the Rajah sets great store. On many horses

has my father set store, but when the racing comes he loses much money and in our household grief reigns. My father and my mother, the Ranee, who had already from a bullock cart beheld thy entrance to the town, as we discovered, although they kept the fact hidden, laughed loud when thou saidest that ill-luck had come with this yellow horse. But we others of the Palace knew better. We know and believe thy prophecies to be true, O holy one. And so——" he hesitated.

"And so," prompted M'Whizzle, in dulcet tones.

"And so we have held a secret meeting, from which I come without loss of time to ask that thou, O holy Mullah, intercede with the spirits brooding over us that the harm which threatens through the yellow horse may yet escape our house."

The grinning Archibald listened intently, with expectation of hearing his master say at once that he would be pleased to render every assistance in the direction required. But instead he heard, with mounting admiration for the talents of the great Chief of the Secret Police, a conversation in which the young Malay was skilfully persuaded to reveal the exact whereabouts of the missing racehorse, and finally to offer to lead them to it at once.

"But we must be undisturbed," objected the mullah. "Solitude and secrecy are necessary in order that the spell that I shall weave about the yellow horse prove effective, and danger to the Rajah and his household be averted."

The boy, who had begun to lead the way up a dark side-path, paused and explained that to carry out such

a request would not be difficult, as at that hour all the grooms were away at their evening meal, and the stables would be deserted.

"It is well," said Lochinvar M'Whizzle, gravely. He went over to his young assistant and grasped the halter.

"I will take the camel, Podd," he whispered in English. "You bring up the rear."

"Bring up what sir?" asked Archibald. He looked about him, eager to oblige. "Nothing to bring up, sir," he whispered. Everything's on the camel."

"You walk last," said M'Whizzle, testily. "That's what I mean. . . . And keep a sharp lookout."

The young Eurasian nodded intelligently.

"We're not likely to be attacked," reflected M'Whizzle, "but if we are, it will be in the rear. I give you the post of danger, you see, Podd."

"Yessir," muttered Archibald. . . . "I suppose we couldn't consider putting the camel behind the rear, could we, sir?"

"Obey orders," snapped M'Whizzle, turning to follow the Malay boy.

Archibald walked meditatively behind the camel. His thoughts were not very clear. But it was plain to him that, thanks to luck (or was it to the marvellous skill of his master?), they were about to achieve an undreamt-of success. And it was a success due really to his own enterprise, for had he not entered that expensive restaurant he would never have met Hadji Mahomet. The glass of ale had cost him fifty cents. He resolved to point this out to his master later when he had time.

The path through the wood was dark. He stumbled often over projecting roots of trees. When the party emerged into a pine-apple plantation the going became easier. They passed through a swing-gate and uphill across a couple of grass fields. At the top of the ridge they saw the lights of the Palace of Tidatau shining in the valley close below them. And near at hand was a long line of buildings.

The Malay boy stopped and whispered to M'Whizzle, who at once held up a hand for caution. In dead silence the party crawled on through the gloom. A dog barked. The young Malay spoke to it soothingly. They entered the stable-yard through a high gate, and in another moment Archibald Podd found himself gazing through a doorway with all his eyes—at the long-sought, yellow horse.

It occupied a stall in the stable next to the gate, a very much better stable, he saw at once, than that of Mr Templeton. The walls were tiled, the floor of new blue-brick. It was no wonder, he thought, that Old Joke looked comfortable and contented with his new surroundings. In the division between the stalls a lamp burned, but not so dimly that he could fail to perceive the beauty of the harness hanging from the walls of the empty stall, and the well-kept appearance of the horse's coat.

"It is well, youth," said Lochinvar M'Whizzle, after a sharp glance round.

The boy nodded timidly.

"And now to work without loss of time . . . Noodali! Stay where thou art."

The young clerk started, and bowed.

"Thou, youth," continued M'Whizzle, without any apparent hesitation, "must aid. Art willing?"

"If the task the holy one sets me is not too hard."

"It is a task entirely within the compass of a brave youth such as thou!" said the mullah, gently. "To be brief; this camel of mine has a strange influence upon me and upon the spirits. Oftentimes its influence with those brooding in the air has a malign effect on my magic. This duty therefore is allotted to thee. Take thou the camel and, entering the farthermost empty stable, shut fast the door, and remain there until my slave, Noodali, gives the signal. Thus by thy aid my magic shall have full play."

The boy hesitated.

"Come now, brave one," bantered the mullah. "Art afraid?"

It was wonderful to see him coax that stupid-looking boy along with the camel into an empty stall. Why it was the victim suspected nothing was equally wonderful. But Archibald in his association with the great Chief of the Secret Police had almost got to the pitch of wondering at nothing.

He heard the stable door shut and then, actually, the click of a bolt shot home.

His master came back, and without a word entered and unhitched the horse. The bricks rang under its hoofs as they led it into the darkness. The dog rushed out barking. There was nobody now to soothe it into quiet. Archibald tried, with half a brick, but unsuccessfully.

They made a bee-line for the river, and crossed it at the ford. The horse gave them no trouble. And

then on by an unfrequented by-road to Singapore! It seemed no time at all to Archibald before, torn, wet, breathless, perspiring, and above all very joyous, he was leading the missing racehorse through their alley within a few steps of home.

They were in the yard, safe! He tethered his charge to the post which but a few hours before had the honour of holding captive the camel, and rushed indoors nearly bursting with pride at his achievement to receive hearty congratulations—of which so far there had been a marked scarcity.

Alas, his master was at the telephone, speaking, obviously,to Mr Templeton. What was that he was saying? The young confidential clerk stopped, stiff with indignation at the ingratitude of it.

"Yes, I'm exceedingly pleased that I have been so successful, Mr Templeton—Oh, it's kind of you to say so—Eh, what's that?—Oh, no, I had no trouble, never seem to when I look after an affair myself, funnily enough. One can't trust subordinates—Managed the job single-handed—Of course I had an Eurasian servant with me—Rather in the way?—Well, I don't know—You know what these Eurasians are—Old Joke, yes, it's very well—looks a little plumper perhaps—You don't think its late for me to come up, then?—Come as I am?—Very well, my dear Mr Templeton, I will start at once."

It seemed to Archibald that about this speech there was too much 'I.' Drooping dejectedly, he turned away in silence.

CHAPTER XII

MAUD ANDERBY'S first recollection was of a little girl who lived in a state of perspiration in a great red-brick hotel. The hotel stood by itself in the middle of a green that was always baked yellow by the sun, facing a never-resting, glittering sea. Black shining crows flew about unceasingly, perching in the coconut palms. They and the dark-skinned ayahs were the only inhabitants of the hotel garden in the morning except for other little girls like herself. Later on, about tiffin time, rickshas and gharries would stream along the glaring white road that led from town, and out of them would step beautiful sahibs, all of them certainly very rich, because they dressed so finely in spotless white and wore wonderful topees, which her ayah said came from Belait.

Her mother knew all these wonderful white men, and later she got to know many of them herself. They used to bring her toys and sweeties from town; and when she climbed on their knees to thank them she was very careful not to dirty their beautiful white clothes with her dusty shoes, because if she did they would never bring her any more sweeties, so her mother said. Her mother used to sit in her chair on the veranda after tiffin, smiling and looking very beautiful. She was never vexed when sahibs, even

strange sahibs, caught Maud in their arms, lifted her, admired her pretty frocks, and petted her.

Once, indeed, she spoke rather sharply. This was when Maud, noticing one guest—who her mother had already said looked lonely—sit down away from the jolly party on the veranda, and stare seawards, ran over and, clambering on his knee, asked him to play with her. Her mother rose, apologized, and took her away, but she was not really angry; and when they got to the bedroom she kissed her.

It seemed from what her ayah said that this sahib was a merchant, and so rich that ordinary people hardly dared speak to him. And the sahib was not angry with her himself. He told her afterwards that it was the best day's work she had ever done, and bought her a beautiful pearl necklace. When he had fastened it round her neck, he turned to her mother with a smile, and drew a red morocco case from his pocket in which was a ring that glittered like a wave in the sun. And without a word he took her mother's left hand and slipped the ring on her third finger.

She remembered her mother saying: "What a handsome ring. It's too good. You should not have spent all that money."

After that there was a wedding, with a lot of laughing people and kissing and hand-shaking. She had a new dress, and was allowed to sit up in the evening on the veranda, where nobody took much notice of her, and she watched the moon glinting through the coconut palms. That was what she remembered of her mother's second wedding.

Next morning they drove to the steamer which took

them to England, where, after a while, she said good-bye to her ayah and went to boarding school, thus, in the usual manner, ending for a time her Eastern life.

During those school days mother and step-father never visited England. They wrote often, affectionate letters enough. Maud's memory pictured them to her as perfect people of enormous proportions. But when she joined them at Singapore she found them strangely shrunken and, to her disappointment, very ordinary. This first impression intensified as the weeks rolled on. Mr Templeton had aged and grown irritable. On her mother's features, too, the years had left their story. And she was stout and peevish. Both parents had grown to think alike in many things. From most of their opinions Maud differed, but she said but little.

When Lochinvar M'Whizzle, calling shortly after her arrival, was put forward as a perfect specimen of manhood, she said but little. Even when hints had been thrown out that with due encouragement the perfect specimen might be hers for the asking, she said but little. Her attitude towards such a desirable parti was enough to irritate any parents.

One's children usually are a disappointing race, never more so than when they deliberately flout arrangements made for their benefit. Mr Templeton, having married for love, devoutly believed a marriage of convenience the only possible arrangement. His wife agreed with him. Having experienced such a marriage twice, she felt she ought to know. And there was a man like Lochinvar M'Whizzle being actually kept waiting!

The constant devotion that M'Whizzle showed! His going, at great inconvenience, to find Old Joke! What did she care, the irritating girl? She even looked, her mother declared, sorry when Lochinvar rang up on the telephone to announce that the horse was found.

Maud never enjoyed a half-hour less than the one spent in listening quietly while her parents, roused by the tidings over the telephone, gave her their views. What her mother said did not matter. But her step-father was different. He was a man, she knew, who would never wish anything for her but the best. And his heart seemed in this business. M'Whizzle, everything that was good before, had in this last venture proved himself to be that best thing of all in his eyes, a 'good sport.'

"And when you get a good sport," said Mr Templeton, his voice shaking with emotion, "take my advice, and don't cast him aside without serious thought. For, as I've proved in sixty years of life, there's no good sport that isn't at bottom a good man."

It was not in Maud to look at that kind red face and moist blue eyes and show anger. Her reply was non-committal, and seemed to satisfy him. Afterwards, on the veranda, it struck her that she had been too non-committal.

She heard the gharry arrive, caught a glimpse of the descending mullah, and hurried off to bed. It was only under the stress of her mother's pressure that she put on her dress again and came downstairs. They were in the drawing-room, she had understood from her mother. She entered, and tried too late to with-

draw. The mullah was there alone and, judging from his triumphant smile, was evidently expecting her. He rose from near the door-mat, and shut the door with determination. His pale face gave him the appearance of one whose hour had come.

"They told you I was here?" he asked in a tender voice.

Emitting a well-modulated exclamation of surprise, Maud sat on a small chair.

"What, another disguise?"

"Didn't you know me, Miss Anderby?" asked the Chief of the Secret Police, looking pleased. "That is flattering. And yet," he added, coming close and squatting Indian fashion on the floor beside her, "I am not certain whether I am pleased or not."

"No?"

"You see," he returned, "Whatever my disguise, I should like you to recognize me."

"We all recognize you, Mr M'Whizzle," she replied in a gracious voice. "The whole of Singapore does. Your talent is unique in Malaya."

"I merely do my duty," he said, bowing modestly.

"You bring genius to your task," she declared.

"The greatest of my rewards," he murmured, bowing again, "is to hear those sweet lips say so."

He was becoming romantic! Maud, to her astonishment, found herself laughing inwardly. She looked at a picture opposite. It was a view of the Galle Face. Many were the young men she had met there and elsewhere. Looking back through the years, she decided she could remember not one who in any way approached the small gentleman who squatted beside

her for singularity. His conceit was absolutely appalling. She had already given him a fairly big dose of flattery. How much could he really swallow? She decided to find out. It would be amusing, anyhow.

Glancing downwards, she perceived that he had caught sight of a long mirror near him, and was happily occupied in studying his own reflection.

"I agree with you perfectly," she said in a solemn tone.

The Chief of the Secret Police broke off his inspection and gazed up. He smiled.

"You agree?" he murmured, puzzled.

"You are the beau ideal of a mullah," said Maud.

"You think so?" His face lighted up. "I was looking to see if I could really improve on the disguise."

"And you decided?"

"That I could not," said M'Whizzle, simply.

"You certainly could not," agreed Maud, with emphasis. "You *are* a mullah. Every time I look at you a spasm of fear seizes me. I have to say firmly to myself, 'It's Mr M'Whizzle, and not the late Mahdi.'"

"I hope you'll never be afraid of me, Miss Anderby," murmured the Chief of the Secret Police in a tender tone.

He moved closer. It was coming! By the look on his face she knew it was coming! And all she was wondering now was how he would do it.

"Miss Anderby," he said impressively. "Mau—Miss Anderby! . . . You have no doubt wondered often why I come so frequently to this house and to no other in Singapore?"

"Me? . . . I've spent days at it, to be candid."

The mullah's face brightened. He rose to his knees.

"Even mullahs have their weaknesses," he said, smiling playfully. "Ma—er—Miss Anderby, I too have mine."

"Impossible!" declared Maud, stifling a laugh. "You are overstrained, probably by the terrible adventure you have just been through. It was splendid. But your nerve has gone for the moment. You are not yourself. I can't imagine you to have any weaknesses when you are your usual self!"

"Oh yes, I have. Can you wonder? There is one I must confess to. A serious weakness! And it concerns you." He laid a hand on the arm of the small chair. "Please don't think of me always as a high official, Chief of the Secret Police. Think of young Lochinvar who rode out of the west, and who loves—"

"And who brought back the racehorse," broke in Maud, quickly.

"Yes," said Lochinvar, drawing closer still to her chair, and throwing out his chest. "I've brought back the racehorse. I'd bring back a thousand to win such a guerdon. Ma—Miss Anderby, you know what I'm going to ask! You know, and I can read your answer in your eyes. Will you——"

"One moment," cried Maud, getting rather alarmed. She raised her hand. "Think well before you speak, before you ruin the greatest career that Singapore has ever known!"

"I have thought it all out," Lochinvar assured her eagerly. "You will not interfere with my career in the least, I assure you."

"No great and adventurous career can be tied to a woman and remain great," said Maud, solemnly. "It may remain adventurous."

"Mine can, I think," he urged.

"Yours can, Mr M'Whizzle, with the secrets entrusted to you by the Government as Chief of the Secret Police?"

"My wife should never know them."

"For my part, I would never tolerate any husband whose every secret I did not share," said Maud in her most savage voice. "Not for one instant."

The mullah looked at her in some consternation.

"Some secrets I should never be able to share," he muttered.

"Then that would mean want of confidence and unhappiness."

"You think so?"

"I was never more certain of anything," said Maud, smiting the arm of her chair with emphasis.

The mullah, obviously astonished at such an exhibition of violence from—superficially—the calmest girl in Singapore, started back.

"And there are heaps of other reasons why you should not marry," continued Maud, quickly. "You go out in the evening. Your wife insists on knowing where you've been. That's jealousy! She suspects you. You've naturally been in a low native quarter pursuing your investigations. Your wife won't let you sit down to dinner until disinfected. You are suddenly sent for at midnight. Your wife has hysteria. She's afraid to be left alone. You cannot answer the summons. The local opium dens know you no more. You

move into a bungalow at Tanglin, your house in the slum being too malarial for your wife. Once in Tanglin you have to entertain. You become the centre of a whirl of feverish gaiety. You get to like it."

"I never should," said M'Whizzle, emphatically.

"You would! You would no longer be Lochinvar M'Whizzle, you would be one of a partnership known as the M'Whizzles. You'd grow fond of good living, grow fat, elderly——"

"Miss Anderby!" The Chief of the Secret Police stared at her, horrified.

"Napoleon Buonaparte grew fat and elderly after he married," pointed out Maud, ruthlessly. "You would grow fat and elderly too. I know you would. I've an instinct. Women often have, haven't they?"

M'Whizzle nodded dismally.

"There would be moments in the midst of all this gaiety when you would sit apart, head on hand, thinking over the days that were gone for ever, thinking over what might have been. Your wife would see this. Remorse for having ruined your career would fill her. She would plunge more than ever into the fever of gaiety. She might—she might—take to drink!"

Maud, ending in a whisper, leant forward in her chair, and gazed in her suitor's horror-struck eyes.

"And you would wish me," she asked slowly, "to undertake the ruin of such a great career?"

"I thought," faltered the mullah, "that I might take the opportunity of discussing——"

"You would never have thought of that unless unstrung," said Maud, with conviction. "In the cold

clear moments of ordinary existence we women are but a trifle to men such as you."

"Miss Anderby," remonstrated Lochinvar, "I can assure you—not at all."

"You pass us, little candles by the wayside," said Maud, her rapturous gaze on the ceiling, "lighting you on your road to fame. You march on firmly, your eyes fixed on your star. It beckons you ever onward."

"Yes," said M'Whizzle, rapturously. "It's true!"

"'Light hands cling to the bridle rein,'" quoted Maud, softly. "'Slipping the spur from the booted heel. Tenderest voices cry "Turn again." Red lips tarnish the scabbarded steel. High hopes faint on a warm hearth stone, He travels the fastest who travels alone!' . . . And you ask me to take that part? Is it fair to you? Is it fair to me, on whom might fall in after years the reproach of having ruined a great career?"

M'Whizzle looked at her hesitatingly. A tinge of relief showed on his face.

"Miss Anderby," he said hoarsely, "your unselfishness makes me ashamed—No, it is not fair."

"Thank you," said Maud in her best emotional tone.

"Your beauty and goodness led me astray," explained the mullah in an agitated voice. "You have shown me the true course. . . . It is a hard course——" He faltered.

"But you'll tread it," cried Maud, hastily, "like—like the great-souled creature that you know yourself to be. Promise me that, Mr M'Whizzle!'"

"I—I will."

"You've made me a proud woman to-night," said

Maud, who had a vague idea that this was the right sentence to wind up with.

He managed to grasp her hand, with the object of putting it to his lips; but instead she squeezed his fingers vigorously, at the same time rising.

"The best of talks has to come to an end," she sighed. "We must go. They'll wonder what has become of us. We understand each other perfectly now?"

M'Whizzle said they did. He repeated his remark in answer to the earnest inquiry of Mrs Templeton a little later. She took it for granted that they were engaged. On proceeding to congratulate them, she was surprised to be told by Maud, backed by M'Whizzle, that such was not the case. But there evidently was some secret between them, judging from the smiles they gave each other. Mrs Templeton resolved to tackle her daughter about it later. Meanwhile, she accepted, on behalf of all, the suitor's invitation to breakfast next morning to celebrate the handing back of the racehorse Old Joke.

CHAPTER XIII

ARCHIBALD woke next morning to find that the day of rest he had promised himself was not yet. Summoned early, he went to the bedroom and found his master squatting on his native string bed arrayed in black silk Chinese sleeping trousers and a muslin dressing-jacket. A cup of Mocha coffee and a Java cigarette lay on a small carved table by the bedside untouched.

The Chief of the Secret Police looked tired and a shade melancholy; but the great brain behind those small black eyes was in good working order, and the number of jobs Archibald was given to do before breakfast proved to him once again what a marvellous organizer he had for a master.

The work, however, promised to set a final seal on their mutual glory. Archibald did not spare himself that morning. Through the dark gloomy house he buzzed to and fro, busy as a blue-bottle fly. By breakfast time he had succeeded in rousing the Chinese servants to such a pitch of irritation that they pounced on him in a body and turned him out of the kitchen, whither he had come to demand on behalf of his master further news of how the shark's fin cutlets were progressing.

It was irritating that a confidential clerk should be

treated thus by a parcel of cheeky servants, but Archibald, conscious that most of this ebullition of ill-feeling was due to envy, resisted an impulse to report the matter to headquarters, and retired meditatively to the backyard.

The horse was still there. It, too, seemed in a bad temper that morning. It made a curious noise which he thought sounded like braying, shivered all over, and, lifting its head, looked at him evilly. The reception dampened him.

"Old Joke," he cooed, advancing gingerly with hand outstretched, "Old Joke—good fellow-w!"

He retired, and came back presently holding a piece of sugar-cane between thumb and forefinger. This time his advances were more successful, the affectionate animal even showing signs of wanting part of his hand as a souvenir.

He retreated to a corner of the yard, and squatted on the ground in meditation. All preparations were now complete. Breakfast had been laid for a dozen. He himself with Mr Ryan, the groom, were to be present at it. He wondered if Nelly, too, would come. For her to be there as witness of his glory would be fitting.

There was a loud knock at the front door. He ran in. They had come. They were filing one by one into the ante-room, Mr Templeton, his lady, the young missie, and behind them, the groom—and Nelly. He could scarcely restrain his excitement at the sight of her. But he did restrain it, clutching the curtain of the ante-chamber and peeping through. There they were, all of them, waiting about uncertainly. Pres-

ently in strode his master, dressed, not as a humble mullah now, but in short red coat, green trousers, with a purple turban on his head and a yellow *sarong* round his waist. He looked the picture of a Malay sultan on a small scale. From the girdled sarong projected the carved handle of a short kris. He no longer salaamed low in the manner of a beggar, but his bow was curt and royal, as befitted a successful Chief of the Secret Police. He glanced round him, Archibald saw, disdainfully.

"Be seated, please," he said, with a motion of his jewelled right hand.

The party stumbled towards the line of cushions by the wall. It was plain to Archibald that they were vastly impressed, and indeed felt awkward and out of place in the company of that oriental splendour. Nelly, it seemed to him, was the only one who sat down gracefully. In the curtained room there was sufficient light to make the features of all visible, and hers looked to him the handsomest and most animated. The expression of the other girl, Miss Anderby, seemed listless, while that of the ex-jockey, who had brought with him saddle and bridle to ride the race-horse home, indicated merely intense disgust.

The Chief of the Secret Police rose from his purple cushion.

"To you all," he said in a dignified voice, "and especially to that star at whose feet I remain abased, in safety come, and in safety depart!"

Amid an impressive silence he sat down again, and touched a silver gong. Two Chinese servants at once entered and flung back the window curtains. Sunlight

streamed in, flooding the apartment. A servant walked noiselessly across the floor and opened wide a door.

Lochinvar M'Whizzle clapped his hands loudly. On receipt of the signal Archibald Podd rushed into the yard, and although the astonished racehorse showed symptoms of interfering, seized it by the halter and led it prancing into the ante-room.

He stood before the audience, his eyes flashing, a grin of intense triumph on his tawny face.

Lochinvar M'Whizzle rose, a slight smile playing about his features.

"Your missing racehorse, Mr Templeton," he remarked in an unconcerned voice.

The young confidential clerk, his face absolutely radiant, turned and waited for the broken words of gratitude that should now fall from the elderly merchant's lips.

He noted with growing astonishment that none did fall.

"Your missing racehorse, Old Joke," said M'Whizzle again, in a louder key.

But still the old gentleman continued to stare in silence. A slight but most disturbing sound arose from a corner of the room. Some disrespectful person, it looked like Nelly, was tittering. Archibald threw an indignant glance in her direction.

"Your missing racehorse, Mr Templeton!" said M'Whizzle once more. This time a tone in his voice betrayed visible signs of irritation at the merchant's lack of demonstrativeness.

"It's not my racehorse!" snapped Mr Templeton.

CHAPTER XIV

THE dead silence that ensued was almost too tense to be borne. Archibald Podd, his hand still clasping the bridle, took an impulsive step forward and stood, trembling with surprise and disappointment, waiting for somebody to say something. He felt that he could not wait long.

"Not your racehorse!" gasped the Chief of the Secret Police. "But it must be your racehorse."

"It is his racehorse, sir, I know it," cried Archibald Podd in great excitement. "It's of the same yellow colour, I know it; it has the same face, I know it also; and when it smiles at me, it smiles just the same as did Old Joke."

"It's not even a horse," said the merchant, angrily.

"Not a horse!" ejaculated M'Whizzle. He laughed. "Now, my dear Mr Templeton! This is no time for joking!"

"It iss a horse, sir," insisted the indignant Archibald. He stepped a pace forward. "I may be an Eurasian, sir, but I am willing at any time to take my bible oath that this animal is a horse. I have seen more than one of the species in Borneo, and I cannot be misleaded! I have studied their appearances and their habits, I have read of them in books, and have seen many of their pictures, and I can assure you all, ladies and gentlemen, that this is a *real horse!*"

He waved his free arm and rolled his eyes with excitement, but so far kept his head as to give a glance at Nelly to see how his behaviour was impressing her. He noted with surprise that she appeared intensely amused.

"This animal is not a horse," said Mr Templeton, firmly.

His master also, Archibald saw, was behaving with great patience.

"If you will kindly tell me what this animal is then?" he heard him ask the merchant in slightly disdainful tones.

"A mare, sir," said Mr Templeton, brusquely.

It was apparent from the ejaculation his master gave vent to that the reply had not quite taken his breath away.

"And more than that, sir," chimed in Ryan from his corner. "If I'm not very much mistaken, it is the chestnut filly Bintang, belonging to the Rajah of Tidatau, and the second favourite for the Singapore Derby.

"What?" cried M'Whizzle, in a high-pitched voice. "What?"

Archibald was nearly bursting with excitement. Plainly his master was losing his head. He himself must come to the rescue.

"It is a horse," he cried loudly. "First you call it a mare, now you call it a fillet. But it is a horse."

"It's not, sonny," said Ryan, coming over to him. "It's a filly."

"But Mr Templeton has just said it is a mare!" cried Archibald fiercely. "You are deceiving us, sir."

"So it is a mare," returned Ryan. "In a manner of speaking."

"And pray, what kind of animal is a mare, Mr Ryan?" sneered Archibald politely, but incredulously. "You must think we're perfect fools, we policemen!"

"A mare? You'll kill me yet, Podd," laughed the groom. "A mare's a lady horse. Now you know."

"Oah!"

An expression of disappointed enlightenment took possession of the young Eurasian's features. He eyed the groom gloomily.

"A she-horse! Then this animal we have here under discussion is not Old Joke?"

"Certainly not."

"It is a perfect stranger," muttered Archibald, in a tone of deep disappointment. He threw an irritated glance at the animal. "Oh, Mr Ryan," he went on, "if you could only realize how carefully I tended this horse—fillet, I mean—thinking it was an old friend, how I feeded it always, and would have brushed its coat but for the uncertain attitude of its hind legs, you would unnerstan' my immense disgust at this horse—I mean fillet—for being what it is."

His abashed glance swept the room. It was enough to make anyone weep, this disappointment. And apparently all were ready to laugh at him. Nelly, too, had laughed at him. Now she was talking to Miss Anderby. Did she blame him? Had she no sympathy with the plight in which he and his master found themselves? She looked up. Not a hint! He ground his teeth as he stood there loosely holding the halter. He heard his master talking eagerly to the

merchant, trying to explain, without much success apparently, how it all had happened.

"You gave me no particulars as to the sex of the animal," he was pointing out. "I knew, of course, that it was chestnut in colour."

"And what else did you know?" demanded Mr Templeton.

"I—I had private information," hesitated M'Whizzle. "My man, Podd, for one thing, told me——"

Archibald started, and threw a suspicious glance at the pair. Was he to be blamed for the failure, then? It seemed hardly fair. He looked round to try and gather what the others thought. Nobody was now taking the slightest notice of him. They had risen and were preparing to go. They would not hear, it seemed, of stopping for the Chinese breakfast. Mr Templeton said that he had wasted too much time already. He was purple with indignation was that old gentleman. Every time Archibald glanced at him his hue seemed to have grown deeper.

"I shall certainly get all the blame when they have gone," reflected Archibald. His heart was sinking fast.

There was a loud rat-tat at the front door, and the sound of angry voices demanding admittance. Something was happening in the hall. The Chief of the Secret Police grew paler than ever.

A Sikh policeman clattered in, closed the door carefully behind him, and saluted.

"Great Tuan, may I speak?"

Lochinvar M'Whizzle nodded.

"The Rajah of Tidatau and his followers are here at the gate, demanding entrance," said the Sikh in

Malay. "They say that a horse has been stolen from their palace and that they have traced it to this house."

A dead silence spread over the room.

"Tell them—" said M'Whizzle at last, "tell them that—that the matter will be investigated by the Government, and that in due course they will be communicated with."

"I have already done so, Tuan," said the Sikh. He drew himself up proudly. "Is not thy servant also of the Government, and does not he know what reply to make to the vile ones without?"

"It is well," said M'Whizzle. "Go in peace."

The man saluted, turned to the door, stopped, hesitated.

"But, O great Lord," he objected, "this Rajah is a rude man. He understands not the habits of the Government, and says he is not prepared to wait until communicated with in due course. He says he might be dead before then. He declares the horse is here. He demands it at once, and also the prosecution of the thieves."

"We shall have to get rid of the horse—mare, before they're allowed in," muttered M'Whizzle. He looked at the merchant undecidedly.

"I think the best plan would be, Mr Templeton," he ventured, "that your man Ryan should saddle it and take it out by the back way to your stable. We can decide later what to do with it."

"I will not touch it with a pair of tongs," said the merchant, firmly. "Is it likely?"

M'Whizzle, looking gloomier than ever, asked for a loan of the saddle and bridle.

It seemed at first that these also were to be denied him, but on Ryan pointing out that they had not the Templeton monogram stamped on them, the merchant gave way.

"Thank you," said M'Whizzle. "Podd, I understand from you that you know all about horses!"

Archibald nodded uncertainly. He was not quite sure that he did, but recollected having talked a lot on the subject to his master, as well as to some of the others present. The circumstance made it difficult for a man of honour to hang back.

"Very well," said M'Whizzle. "Take the animal into the yard, saddle and bridle it, and ride it back unobserved to Tidatau."

"What, me, Mr M'Whizzle?"

"Obey orders," snapped the Chief of the Secret Police, apparently glad to adopt again his old tone.

"Yessir."

Archibald, realizing that he had after all heard aright, allowed the groom to put saddle and bridle in his free arm, and disappeared, leading the animal after him.

The Sikh constable came back and stated the Rajah of Tidatau still refused to depart, and requested an immediate interview. Another non-committal reply was despatched to him, and the company waited in silence to give Podd and the horse time to get clear away.

Sounds of stamping, due presumably to an unwilling horse being saddled, penetrated the ante-room. Maud, after a while, whispered to Nelly who, nodding, disappeared through the door that led to the yard. A

few minutes later the sound of hoofs ceased. But the noise in the other direction grew louder. There was evidently serious trouble brewing on the front door step. The Sikh constable dashed in again.

"Lord of the Detectives!" he called out excitedly, "The——"

"Thy manners?" said M'Whizzle, in a cold voice. . . . "That's better," he added, as the Sikh raised his hand to the salute. "I never let them presume," he whispered to Mr Templeton, "even in the most desperate situations."

The merchant gave a growl of disgust.

"The Rajah and his men are forcing the entrance," said the Sikh.

"Then resist with all thy strength," directed the Chief of the Secret Police in a determined voice.

The Sikh constable explained that he had already done that, but that now the attacking party had renewed their assault armed with tins of beef-dripping, and his men were afraid of defilement.

"We must dash to their assistance," exclaimed M'Whizzle, getting up. "Once the Rajah's people begin to throw beef-dripping about, they'll drive all my Sikhs off the premises."

"That's your look-out," snapped the merchant. Don't you move from your seat, either, Ryan," he shouted, as the groom rose.

"I was only goin' to bolt the door leading to the yard," explained the ex-jockey. "I don't want my daughter mixed up with all these savages."

"Bolt the door leading to the yard, constable," ordered M'Whizzle in ringing tones. "Stand on

guard before it, and run through anyone who attempts to pass with your bayonet. They can apply to me personally for compensation afterwards. Now, all you men, keep your heads and guard the women and children. I am going into the front hall to save you."

Drawing his kris, he darted across the floor, and, stumbling near the door, stabbed a velvet cushion through the exact centre. He picked himself up, breathing hard, and was engaged in attempting to recover his weapon, the point of which had apparently become hopelessly jammed between the floor boards, when, with a series of yells and a patter of naked feet, a number of excited Malays, each armed with a small tin of beef-dripping, dashed into the apartment.

That they expected to find the missing horse there was evident from the cries of rage they immediately emitted. The Sikh constable, however, seemed to provide an agreeable substitute. They proceeded to defile him thoroughly from a safe distance with accurately-thrown handfuls of beef-dripping.

The man defended himself as well as he could with his bayonet, but being unsuccessful in catching much beef-dripping on its point, threw this weapon away in disgust, and, picking up a bamboo mat, held it before him. M'Whizzle, with a final desperate tug, rescued his kris from the grip of the crack, rapidly disengaged the cushion from the crooked blade, and rushed to the rescue. Standing in an attitude of defiance, he received a well-aimed tin with the centre of his fine forehead. Another tin he accidentally transfixed with his rapidly-waving kris, and flung from him contemptuously. At the command of a tall Malay

in a red turbash, the attack ceased as suddenly as it had begun. Seizing the bamboo mat, M'Whizzle flung it indignantly aside, and, regardless of the state of his own person, turned to the Sikh and began to scrape away several large pieces of beef-dripping that were adhering to his whiskers.

"When you have a moment to spare," said the tall Malay, sarcastically, "will you kindly tell me where I shall find my horse?"

The expression of ignorance on the face of the great detective as he turned and faced the intruder was marvellous in its intensity.

"My good man," he remarked off-handedly, "you've evidently mistaken the house. Try next door."

With an impatient wave of his kris, he turned and resumed his labour at the Sikh's whiskers.

"The horse has been tracked here by my men," said the Malay, quietly. "It was in this room a moment ago. I am the Rajah of Tidatau."

M'Whizzle lowered his kris, and turned again.

"I am not in the habit of keeping horses in my drawing-room," he said icily, "whatever may be the custom of the Rajah of Tidatau. I tell you again, try next door. Moreover, try before you drive me to assert my official position."

"It would be awkward for you," sneered the tall Malay, "if you had to assert your official position at this moment."

"I'll have you all arrested in a minute," threatened the Chief of the Secret Police. "Practical joking I do not mind. But when it comes to flinging beef dripping about my drawing-room, even my patience

has its limits. It is a proceeding that repels my aesthetic sense, and besides, the fire insurance people strongly object to it. In fact, it is one of those things which are not done among civilized peoples. Are not done, I repeat, sir! Though, as a Malay, you can hardly be expected to know that."

"This is mere cackle," said the Rajah, contemptuously. "Where's my horse?"

With an ostentatious air of impatience M'Whizzle sheathed his kris, and stalked to the centre of the room.

"How many times," he asked furiously, "have I to say that your horse is not here? Will you depart from my premises and withdraw your men at once?"

"No, I will not," said the Malay, firmly. "I want my horse. You can have your camel in exchange."

"What camel?"

"A camel!" exclaimed the merchant in astonishment, opening his mouth for the first time since the Rajah's entrance.

"Yes, sir, a camel," said the Rajah. "I know you, Mr Templeton," he went on. "I also know that your famous racehorse is missing. You will believe me when I say that I have had nothing to do with its disappearance."

The merchant nodded non-committally.

"You are here," the Rajah went on rapidly, "with your wife and daughter in the hope of having your racehorse returned. I am sorry for your disappointment. But when you employ a boob who hardly knows a horse from a camel, what else can you expect?"

The Chief of the Secret Police gave the merchant a compassionate smile, and nodded at Maud reassuringly.

"Mr M'Whizzle, as you know," went on the Rajah, "has a confidential clerk, a young Eurasian named—let me see. He gave me his card and told me to think of the sweet pea flower—yes, Podd, that's the name. I met the young fellow in Singapore casually, and told him that my name was Hadji Mahomet. You have heard the name, I see, Mr M'Whizzle."

The great detective shrugged his shoulders with what seemed to Maud a sudden increase of irritation.

"I told Podd, just for a joke," the Rajah went on, "that I had seen the missing racehorse in the Palace at Tidatau. He believed me, and went away in great excitement. And, better still, his diabolically clever master believed the tale too."

"I did not," exclaimed Lochinvar M'Whizzle, angrily. Recovering himself, he glanced round, and, observing the purple face of the merchant, bestowed on it a reassuring wink.

"So these two clever fellows, Mr Templeton," pursued the Malay in an even tone, "procured a camel from goodness knows where, disguised themselves as a mullah and his slave, and set out for Tidatau. My wife met them at the bridge and detected them at once."

The famous detective was unable to suppress an exclamation of annoyance.

"Afterwards," went on the Rajah, "they attempted some feeble conjuring tricks at the hotel, and were hissed off the scene. Then we had a game with them

at the Palace, and they left for home, thoroughly tired out. But, unfortunately, some of the more ignorant of my women-folk whom my wife and I had not taken into our confidence, grew alarmed at certain threats Mr M'Whizzle made concerning evil spirits, and managed to inform him of the whereabouts of a chestnut mare of my own. And as a man who does not know the difference between a horse and a camel was not likely to be able to tell a horse from a mare, one can scarcely be surprised that Mr M'Whizzle promptly annexed my mare and left his camel behind. Now, here is your animal, Mr M'Whizzle"—he walked into the hall, and to the astonishment of the Templetons and their groom, came back leading by its nose-ring a weary-looking camel—"Now, where is my mare?"

It was evidently only by a mighty effort that the Chief of the Secret Police managed to steady himself sufficiently to make a reply.

"A very plausible story," he remarked in a thin voice, "but unfortunately quite unsupported by evidence."

"I don't believe it's untrue, however," muttered the merchant.

Maud Anderby was strongly of her step-father's opinion, and so, she gathered, were the others. The Rajah, unscrupulous man though he might be, was in this instance to be trusted entirely. That was very plain.

"You bring here a camel as evidence of the truth of your story," said M'Whizzle, in a contemptuous voice. "You might have picked the beast up anywhere."

"They are not to be picked up anywhere," the Rajah retorted.

"There are hundreds of them in Singapore," declared M'Whizzle. "Strays from Arab encampments. You may not believe that, Mr Templeton, but your sources of information are meagre compared with mine. As for this cock and bull story about a mare, to disprove it I will strain a point." He stretched himself to his full height, and pointed sternly in the direction of the yard. "You and your men, Rajah, are at liberty to search the premises. Only no more throwing of beef-dripping, if you please. I will not allow it here. Constable, stand aside from the door, and let the Rajah pass through."

The Templetons, following on the heels of the search-party into the empty yard, bade their much-occupied host a cool farewell, and made for home.

CHAPTER XV

NELLY RYAN, walking out of the comparatively quiet antechamber into the dazzling sunlight of the back-yard, stood and gaped. A violent battle was in the act of being decided. In another moment Archibald had won it. He stepped back, glistening with perspiration, and with an obvious air of complacency surveyed the result of his labour.

"And what may you be doing?" inquired the young lady from behind him.

Archibald turned in surprise, and in another instant was bowing delightedly.

"If I had known that horse was a fillet, I would never have been so timid of it, Miss Ryan," he remarked. "I always unnerstood that this was a he-horse from its name, Old Joke; and Mr Ryan, your respectable father, told me the instant I met him that its hind legs were liable to shoot out any time, and that I shouldn't be advisable to come into contact with them. Hence my precautions, you see, Miss Ryan?"

Nelly nodded.

"Up in Labuan we're always accustomed to take a firm hand with the ladies, Miss Ryan," proceeded Archibald, "and now I'm standing no nonsense from this she-horse; no, I am not. She wanted to object

to me putting on that saddle. But I put it on, Miss Ryan. Oah yess, I did. And I wasn't long about it either, now that I know he's a she."

He smiled, very pleased with his success.

"You've put it on wrong," said Nelly, shortly.

Archibald looked at her.

"Oh, no, dear-r lady. That's the way we always put the saddle on in Borneo. Sitting in a horizontal attitude in the exact centre of the spine." He gazed at her anxiously. Women, he knew, even in Borneo, had their caprices.

"Of course, dear-r lady, if you think it would look better one or two feet further towards either of the animal's ends, say the word. My wish is to please you."

"You've got the saddle on the wrong way round," said Nelly, in a tart voice. "Who can wonder the mare's upset?"

"In Borneo we always have the saddle like that," Archibald assured her. "Not a word more, dear-r lady. I'll have it turned round in three minutes. How we have this saddle, we shan't quarrel about that."

He flourished his hand, smiled, and nodded.

"Yes," he remarked in a flattering voice. "It's a good idea of yours to have it turned round, Miss Ryan. It will look, I think, very much better. Up in Borneo——"

"It doesn't matter about Borneo now," said Nelly. "Do you know we have no time to spare? The Rajah may be here at any moment."

"When you are here, dear-r lady," said Archibald, gallantly, "all my time is to spare. You can take the

whole lot. You can even take me as well. Yes, I assure you!"

"Go on, sillee fellow, talking like that now!" cried Nelly Ryan.

Her look quelled Archibald instantly. With a mixture of wonder and irritation he stood watching her undo the girth and put the saddle in its proper position.

"The bridle," she shouted.

He handed it to her mechanically.

It was a pleasure to see how the horse obeyed her. In spite of an uneasy feeling of being that degraded thing, a man in the presence of a woman who knows more than he does, he was secretly relieved that such skilled aid was available. Certainly he would have lost half his hand had he tried to put the bridle on this fierce creature. She had already made one savage attempt on him, but fortunately he had escaped with a torn coat sleeve.

"All is ready," cried Nelly. "Take the reins."

"A thousand thanks, Miss Ryan. A thousand thanks. Oah, yess, the reins. . . . Thank you."

With the air of a man who had just accepted a gift he really did not want, he held the reins at arm's length unostentatiously, and looked about him.

"Are you going to Tidatau across country or by road?" Nelly asked.

"Which is the shortest?" asked Archibald.

"Across country, silly."

"That's the way I'm goin' then," said Archibald, with decision.

"You're right, Mr Podd; there's no time to lose. She looks a good jumper too!"

Archibald nodded uneasily.

"When you come to a very wide ditch," counselled Nelly, "give her her head, Mr Podd."

"Give her her what, Miss Ryan?"

"Her head."

"But how can I do that when she has it already?" asked Archibald, puzzled.

"Give her her head, you stupid," cried Miss Ryan. "Leave the reins slack and sit tight."

"I will promise you to sit tight," said the young clerk. "I shall also hold on tight when we are swimming the ditches. But I do not like this outlook."

"You'll be all right," said Nelly, comfortingly, "as long as you do what I say. She's very quiet. It'll be like sitting in a cradle. But don't slack the reins too much or she'll take the bit between her teeth."

"She's had a bit between her teeth already this morning, the she-horse devil," said Archibald, viciously, "but it was only a bit of my jacket, thank the goodness! I will take enormous care it doesn't get any more bits. I shall be glad, personally, when this she-horse is safe and sound at Tidatau, and I am safe and sound in some other neighbourhood."

"The bit," explained Nelly, pointing, "is that bar of steel at the end of the bridle. You are stupid!"

"Oah, it can do what it likes with that bar of steel," said Archibald, carelessly. "If it likes to bite it and get toothache, it's nothing to do with me; it's the fillet's lookout."

"All right," snapped Nelly. "Now then, up you get. "I'll open the gate. Good-bye, and good luck."

"Good-bye, Miss Ryan," said Archibald. "Ar—think of me sometimes, will you?"

The gate slammed open. The mare edged sideways restively.

"Very jumpy this morning, isn't she?" said Nelly, coming back. "What, aren't you up yet?"

"I think those dangly-dangly things keep hitting it in the stomach and make it cross," opined Archibald. "We might cast them adrift, don't you think?"

"Oh, you——!" Nelly laughed. "They're the stirrups, boy. You must have them to ride with."

"In Borneo——'" began Archibald, nervously.

"I don't believe there is such a thing as a horse in Borneo," said Nelly, angrily. "I don't think you ever saw a horse. You can't ride one. You're afraid."

"Afraid, miss!" said Archibald, in a terrible voice. With a determined look on his face, he clasped the mare's neck, and in an instant was in the saddle. He began at once to complain of its slipperiness, attempted to follow Nelly's instructions, and put his feet in the stirrups and, after a gallant attempt to save himself, slid gently over sideways.

The sight of his concerned face as he toppled was too much for Nelly. His rueful expression when he picked himself up did nothing to cure her. She shook with laughter. A sound of voices in the house stopped the laughter dead. She seized the reins herself, and leapt into the saddle, sitting astride.

"You big booby!" she hissed.

"I beg your pardon, Miss Ryan," said Archibald, stupidly.

"You know nothing about horses, silly booby,"

said Nelly, in a cruel voice. "Except wooden ones, perhaps. You stay at home, you old woman, and darn stockings, booby. I'll take the mare to Tidatau."

She jerked the reins, and the mare quietly walked out of the gate.

The deeply-wounded Archibald watched the departure thunderstruck. Never before in his existence had he been accused of being that despicable thing a female. It was an insult to be wiped out at once.

He rushed down the slum after her, banging the yard door behind him.

"I'll show you, miss," he cried, "that I can ride a she-horse as well as you!"

He drew alongside, seized Nelly, with as much tenderness as possible in the circumstances, round the waist, and climbed up behind. He nearly brought her over, but not quite. In a few moments he was seated and holding on tight. He felt that so long as he clung to her firmly he was safe.

They were both fairly light weights, and the somewhat stocky animal stood the load well.

"All right," said Nelly, good humouredly. "Sit quiet, and don't be afraid."

She jerked the reins, and as if in order to make her advice to Archibald impossible of accomplishment, the mare broke into a trot.

During the next few minutes the young detective caught a series of spasmodic glimpses of Singapore. There was nothing particularly restful about the place that morning. In fact, he had seldom witnessed more movement in the town. The streets, especially in the native quarter, were annoyingly full of spectators.

Even as they got farther out there seemed more people abroad than usual. He and his companion came in for a flattering amount of notice; small boys, appearing everywhere, yelled a welcome. Missiles whizzed by. There was a dead cat or two.

The soul of Archibald swelled with indignation. It was revolting that two peaceful citizens could not ride through the streets without such attention.

"Miss Ryan," he said loudly. "I want to alight a few moments."

"What's the matter?"

"It's a disgusting matter, dear-r lady. I don't know what it is exactly yet. But it has hit me on my neck's back and still sticks. I wish to return it to its rightful owner as forcibly as possible."

"It's only a banana," said Nelly, looking round.

"It must be the ripest one in Singapore, then," remarked Archibald, indignantly. "Half of it has escaped already—down the back of my neck. However, as long as it's not a dead cat down there I will bear with it."

"It's only a lot of rude little Chinese boys," said Nelly in a consoling voice.

"Let me get down to them, Miss Ryan," demanded Archibald. "And you will see that they will not be a lot long. In two minutes I would make them the littlest lot that ever was."

"We cannot stop now."

"Very well, dear-r lady."

"You're quite comfortable?"

"Comfortable in front," said Archibald, beginning to laugh. "But when the population is busy throwing

the spare parts of their larders after us, I catch myself wishing that I had not a back. It is a pity you was not twins, Miss Ryan."

"Why?"

"Then I could put one of you to ride behind me," explained Archibald. "But I am glad on the other hand that you are not twins, Miss Ryan," he went on, thoughtfully, "for if you was I have a feeling that I should try and commit bigamy, and that might interfere with my prospects as a confident clerk."

Nelly gave no answer except an impatient twitch of the reins. They began to reach open country, and trotted on green turf beside the red road under the shade of giant mimosas white with delicate flowers. Nelly turned the mare into a narrow by-path, where the wall of trees grew even thicker. Here the hot still air held a breath of coolness. She checked the mare into a walk. A white gate barred the road. By her orders Archibald slid off nervously, and opened it. She would not let him re-mount.

"No," she said. "You must walk, Mr Podd. You've had a good rest."

Archibald nodded. The quality of the rest was, he felt, a matter of opinion, but what was the good of arguing. All his organs, as he had already ascertained, were still in position.

"The mare's had a doing," explained Nelly. "She's in a lather, and quite tired."

She could not have been so tired either, for presently, when Nelly put her at a broad ditch, she went over it with ease. Archibald made an attempt to jump it also, and nearly went through it. Alarmed

by the mighty splash, Nelly turned, and from the other bank watched his frantic efforts to free his feet from the muddy bottom into which they had sunk, and gave him advice, advice which he could not help thinking was absolutely superfluous. He stopped and stared indignantly at her for a moment, then, holding his head well out of the water, recommenced his desperate struggles.

"Keep cool, Mr Podd," said Nelly again. "Keep cool!"

"I am keeping cool, miss," he shouted in a disgusted voice. "I fin' the job an easy one, I can tell you."

A loud splash farther down the ditch, a splash that Nelly informed him was due to a large and hungry-looking crocodile now heading his way, caused him to make a last violent effort, and he succeeded in reaching the bank.

Sitting down at a safe distance from the water's edge, he examined himself all over. Finding that he was still intact, his spirits rose.

"I felt like a fish out of water when I was in it, dear-r lady," he remarked. "But now I feel more of a hero, having just rescued somebody from a crocodile."

"We ought to be getting on our way," suggested Nelly. "It wasn't a crocodile, anyhow. It was just a small monitor lizard. Now doan' begin to tell me about Borneo—I dead sick of what you used to do in Borneo. But I've heard that up there all of you peoples eat lizards. I wonner if it's true."

"Miss Ryan, I assure you on my honour as a perfect

gentleman, I have never eat lizards. I would scorn to eat them."

Rather depressed at her opinion of him, he bent down and cleared the mud from his canvas shoes.

They went on, striking a patch of open country where the path ran through high lalang grass. There had evidently been cultivation here at one time, but now there were no signs of inhabitants. It was a strip of country, Nelly said, held by the Government as a forest reserve. Presently they would strike the main road half-way to Tidatau.

"But there are peoples about here," remarked the steaming Archibald, walking gaily beside the horse's head. The hot sun was now drying him with great rapidity.

"Verree few, I think," said Nelly. "You see none are allowed by the keepers. It is a Government reserve."

"But they are here," said Archibald. "I have seen their footsteps."

"Some pass through, perhaps, although they are not allowed," Nelly told him. "If the police should catch us we might be put in jail."

"But I am a police," pointed out Archibald. "Should anyone strive to put me in jail they would have to answer before Mr M'Whizzle."

"Oh, Mr M'Whizzle!" exclaimed Nelly. "Don't talk about him to me. He's 'most as bad as Borneo." So disgusted was her tone that Archibald looked at her in surprise.

"You don't think he is a great man, I perceive," he remarked.

"Oh, yes, I do," said Nelly, but the smile about her lips hinted that the reply was made with reservations.

"I, being his confident clerk——" began Archibald, proudly.

"I think he is the greatest man in Singapore," interrupted Nelly, "if stupid conceited fellows are men, as I know they are."

"Dear-r lady!" exclaimed the shocked Archibald. He stared at her, and then said with decision: "But you are wrong, that is an obvious."

"Ask Miss Anderby, then, if I am wrong," said Nelly, hotly. "She thinks the same as me, and she thought it before I did, because I heard her."

"You heard her?" muttered Archibald, regarding the young lady on the mare through screwed-up, unbelieving eyes.

"I am always at her house, helping her with her sewing," explained Nelly. "One day a parcel came from your master, Mr M'Whizzle, sending a Chinese robe 2000 years old which had been worn by a woman who died of small-pox. And this silly man wanted her to wear it!"

Archibald blinked thoughtfully.

"What does he want her to die for?" he demanded.

"But he doesn't want her to die, stupid boy!" said Nelly. "He wants to marry her."

Archibald looked at her stupidly.

"And then off you go to Tidatau," laughed Nelly. "And bring back—a mare! And so much fussing and importance! Oh, yes! You are very clever and not at all conceited, you men-fellows. And Mr M'Whizzle, he, of course, is the cleverest. And very shortly Miss

Maud will have to marry him because he is so verree, verree clever, and because Mr and Mrs Templeton wish her to."

Archibald walked on for a few moments in silence.

"Never mind," he said at last. "I still think that Mr M'Whizzle is very clever. He is so clever, in fact, that nobody can understand why he does what he do, and that is the reason many ignorant peoples find him stupid. Needless to remark, I do not find him stupid."

"It was not stupid of him to believe that you could ride a horse, oh no!" pointed out Nelly in a sarcastic tone. "It was very clever. I never believed it; but then I am stupid."

Archibald flushed guiltily. He was conscious of a growing tendency to do so in the presence of this young lady.

"I can ride a horse," he was stung into replying. "I am a splendid horse's rider; the only fault is that I have never had any practice."

"Very well," said Nelly, pulling up the mare and dismounting. "Here you are, Mr Horse Rider. Let us see the splendid riding."

With a smile of anticipation on her broad, comely face, she held out the reins.

But Archibald looked doubtful.

"This, as you know, dear-r lady," he faltered, "is a mare, not a horse. It is also a very high one. But if I was once sitting on it, I could sit on it."

"Up in Borneo, I suppose," said Nellie, "the horses kneel down to let their owners mount. Down in Singapore we call those kind of horses elephants, Mr Podd, not fillets."

Archibald glanced at her. This chit of a girl, apparently, was laughing at him again. For the past few hours he seemed to have been nothing but a bad joke. It was enough to sting anybody into action. After trying in vain to put his foot into a stirrup, he kicked it from him disdainfully, clutched the reins and the filly's mane, and, making the effort of his life, vaulted into the saddle. The surprised filly moved off at a trot. Every jolt threw him a little more from the perpendicular. There could not have been anything more slippery than that saddle; he bent forward, clinging on with hands and with knees; he took a despairing bite at the mane, and hung on with his teeth, shut his eyes, and awoke to find himself still clinging on. Growing cooler, he was astonished to find that he was clinging on easily. His legs, which, when he started, had hung helpless, were now almost horizontal, knees and feet gripping tight the mare's sides. He had, in fact, instinctively adopted the seat used by the Lawas boys when riding buffaloes bare-backed. He had been one of the best of them at that game. This trotting horse was certainly no worse than a galloping buffalo. She slowed down to a walk. Quite confident now, he sat erect, slipped his feet in the stirrups, and at once conscious of the immense help these gave him, gathered up the reins. The docile mare broke into another quiet trot, and he was back again at where Nelly stood.

"I can ride!" he shouted, without making the slightest effort at dissimulating the triumph he felt. "You see, dear-r lady, I can ride!"

"All boys can ride as well as that, stupid," said

Nelly, but in spite of the shock to his pride her remark occasioned, he could not but notice the new tone of respect in her voice. She confessed, too, a little later, as they walked the mare slowly through a strip of dark moist woodland that lay between them and the road, that his effort had been remarkable for a beginner. From the questioning way she ended the sentence, he gathered with a thrill of pride that she was not quite certain whether he was a beginner or not. The fact that when they reached the road she, instead of demanding the reins, took unquestioning his former humble position on the mare, seemed to show that she had decided that he was not.

It was with a thrill of possession almost that he felt her soft arms holding on to him as the filly trotted along contentedly. But very soon that delightful ride came to an end. There entered into view cultivated fields, where mushroom-hatted Chinese labourers in blue dungaree were busy hoeing up the weeds between rows of rubber saplings.

"This plantation," said Nelly, "belongs to the Rajah of Tidatau. We will leave the mare here."

Archibald Podd dismounted after her. They led the mare into a belt of wood, unsaddled and abandoned her. Guided by Nelly, they hurried through by-ways back to Singapore. Say rather that they should have hurried. For it was well on towards evening when Archibald deposited at the Ryans' bungalow a saddle, a bridle, and the only girl in the world, and turned his dirty but triumphant face in the direction of home.

CHAPTER XVI

MAUD ANDERBY, hurrying over to the Ryans' bungalow the first thing in the morning to find out if her young sewing-maid was still missing, was overjoyed to meet at the stables Nelly herself. The girl showed no signs of having encountered any of the awful fates that Mrs Templeton had at once prophesied for her on her disappearance. On the contrary she looked well, and prettier than ever in a clean blue cotton frock. With an air of suppressed excitement, she overwhelmed Maud in a flood of narrative about the doings of herself and Archibald, who, from her account, had suddenly developed a particularly fine character.

"I hope he settles down and marries," remarked Maud, looking at her shrewdly. "I always think it's the best way round. He's not engaged yet, I suppose?"

Nelly's reply was to the effect that she had not gone into the question. But Maud noted the blush and the expression in her modest black eyes. And she felt sorry that the tale she herself had to tell was not likely to be amusing to anyone so obviously interested in the fate of Mr Podd.

"We had troublous times at Mr M'Whizzle's house after you had gone," she began.

"I know that, Missie," returned the maiden, somewhat to her surprise. "The door was burst open, the

Rajah of Tidatàu and his men came in. They had with them a camel, which they said Mr M'Whizzle had left behind him at Tidatau."

"I am afraid Mr M'Whizzle did not show up well at all," Maud remarked. "He tried to make out that the camel was not his, and that he'd never seen it before."

"Yes," said Nelly. "They found Mr M'Whizzle out to be a liar, didn't they?—I mean, miss, how do you say?—A lead-swinger, iss it not? My father told us about it last night."

"At anyrate, Mr M'Whizzle still wanted to persist that the camel was not his, and he did it very badly. I am afraid his face betrayed him."

"It would betray anyone, that face," commented Nelly. "The fact is, Miss Maud, when I saw it first I had to look close to see whether it was a face at all. It looked to me like a pumpkin gone wrong."

"I'm afraid you don't like Mr M'Whizzle," remarked Maud.

"Stupid, sillee man!"

"Nelly!"

"Stupid, sillee man!" said the unabashed Nelly again.

"Do you know, Nelly, he and your friend, young Mr Podd, tried to do conjuring in front of the hotel, and were laughed at?"

"Archibald never told me that!"

"No," said Maud, drily. . . . "He wouldn't. I'm very much afraid, though, that this Archibald of yours is in for troublous times. Mr M'Whizzle naturally does not like him so well now as he did once."

"He has had troublous times already, Missie," said Nelly, with feeling. "That is why I'm looking so pleased."

"You're pleased that he's got into trouble?" exclaimed Maud. "But I thought——"

"Archibald had troublous times directly he got back home last night," Nelly explained. "But Mr M'Whizzle's times were more troublous. I know they were, because Archibald says so. He accused Archibald of being a bad fellow and in league with the Rajah. He accused him of taking him to Tidatau to make him look a fool; and Archibald, who was angry, also told him that he had looked a fool before he went —you see Archibald's opinion of Mr M'Whizzle has much altered since yesterday, when I told to him what a stupid man Mr M'Whizzle was. He did not know before I told him that you and I, Missie, thought Mr M'Whizzle such a booby——"

"But I never said——" Maud began.

"But you looked, Missie."

"So Mr Podd is in trouble," murmured Maud. "Well, I like him. I hope he doesn't have to go back to Borneo. Perhaps things will blow over."

"One thing has blown over," said Nelly. "Archibald blew over at ten o'clock after his quarrel with Mr M'Whizzle, and stayed the night in our bungalow. He said he'd rather be blown over than blown up. And father told him he was right, for no man that was a man should stand a blowing up from one that wasn't, that is from Mr M'Whizzle."

"So Mr Podd has been discharged, and is staying in your bungalow?"

"He discharged himself," explained Nelly, her eyes flashing with pride. "He——"

A loud knock at the stable gate interrupted her.

"It's the horses back from exercise," she called out, flying across the yard. "I was waiting for them."

They filed in slowly, some eight of them. The red-clad Malay syces in attendance wiped down their glistening sides and led them to their several stables. Maud, standing in the shade by the wall, watched the brief picturesque ceremony, observed Nelly walking from syce to syce in the brilliant sunlight, conversing shortly with each and making a note or two in the small book she carried. She explained on coming back that her father was indisposed that morning, and had asked her to see the horses in. Maud smiled. It was common knowledge at home that the girl was nearly as good in charge of stables as her father.

"Sambal looks well," she remarked. Sambal was Mr Templeton's second string for the Derby.

"Yes, he does, Missie," agreed Nelly. "Old Joke gave him ten pounds over five furlongs, before he was stolen," she added, sadly. . . . "I don't think we shall ever see Old Joke again," she murmured.

"You don't think so?" Maud said. "I hope you're wrong." And then, apropos, it seemed, of nothing, she continued: "Do you happen to know, or have you seen about here, a short Kling with very big feet?"

"Noa, Missie, I don't," replied Nelly. She gave her mistress a wondering look. "Why?"

Maud hesitated. "If ever you do notice such a man

about, let me know at once. . . . We'll see how my mongoose is before we go."

They entered the stable. Maud had been in there many times since the horse was stolen. Nobody had disturbed the hutch. Nobody therefore yet shared the secret of the foot-prints underneath it. Now that Lochinvar M'Whizzle had made such a boggle of the search, she reflected, she might perhaps allow somebody to stumble across this rather important clue. But that somebody should not be the famous Chief of the Secret Police. What a contemptible spectacle the man had made of himself yesterday! And the puzzling feature was that nearly all Singapore revered his ability, or said they did. Even Mr Templeton was now showing symptoms of trying to find excuses for yesterday's revelations. It was unfortunate, so her mind travelled inconsequently, that her mother had taken such a bitter dislike to Mrs Nixon.

Her reverie was interrupted by the appearance of that lady herself at the stable door.

"They told me you were at the stables, so I came straight on," said the old lady, advancing. She shook hands and looked approvingly at the curtsying Nelly. "Will you come to tea this afternoon?"

"May I?"

"Alec has another of his attacks of indigestion," said Mrs Nixon. "After yesterday's happening at the only M'Whizzle's, I'm sure I don't wonder at it."

"It was rather awful, wasn't it?" Maud laughed. "Am I a cure for indigestion, then?"

"No," said the old lady, drily. "Merely a counter-irritant. But never mind, you'll come?"

"Oh, yes, thank you very much."

"Now, young woman," said Mrs Nixon, curiously, "tell me about yourself. Were you spirited away, or was the disappearance from the yard due to your having more sense than the rest of us?"

Nelly, not quite sure what she meant, blushed and looked up at Maud.

Then, at the sound of a well-known voice in the stable yard, the trio stiffened. Footsteps were audible. A sentence floated through the air.

"As we are now on the scene of the crime, Mr Templeton, I'll explain to you exactly why I was compelled, with a certain amount of ostentation, as I daresay you noticed, to undertake that journey to Tidatau. You will see, as I go on, that the whole affair was a mere blind on my part, necessitated by the cunning of a certain person we have to tackle."

"If Mr Templeton believes that," muttered the old lady, half to herself, "he'll believe anything."

"Straight in front of us is the gateway to the stables," continued the voice.

"Yes," agreed another voice, which the three women had no difficulty in recognizing.

"Do you perceive anything noteworthy about that gate?" demanded M'Whizzle.

From the silence that ensued, it was apparent that the merchant did not.

"It leads into the road—or street," pointed out M'Whizzle.

"Of course it does," agreed the merchant, testily.

Maud looked at Mrs Nixon, and smiled.

"Old Joke," said M'Whizzle, impressively, "passed

through that gateway on the night of the robbery. I am as certain of that as I am certain of anything within the range of circumstantial proof. Would it surprise you, Mr Templeton, to learn that before I went to Tidatau on what the world at large regards as a useless mission, I thoroughly examined that gateway for finger-prints with the aid of an electric torch and a magnifying glass?"

The inarticulate noise that the merchant made gave the listeners no clue as to whether surprise or disgust predominated within him.

"I examined it," continued M'Whizzle, gravely, "so carefully that there could be no possibility of mistake. I examined the fence, and found similar traces; I examined the stable of Old Joke yonder, and found similar traces. . . . Come into the stall, and I will show you them."

"No, not that one," said the merchant, shortly. "The third from the end was Old Joke's stall."

Lochinvar M'Whizzle apologized profusely. He had so many cases on hand just then, he explained, that he could hardly be expected to remember which stall the missing horse had occupied.

"Go up into the loft, Mr Templeton, taking this torch and magnifying glass with you, and you will find, surrounded by circles of pink chalk, the finger-prints of—— Good morning, Miss Anderby. This is indeed a pleasant surprise. Mrs Nixon—ah—how-do-you-do."

"No great detective is ever surprised," said the old lady at once, "except at the gross stupidity of other people."

"At any rate, Mrs Nixon, I am never surprised at seeing you," said Lochinvar, nastily. "It seems to me you are always there."

"Some great detectives," returned the old lady, unmoved, "are never there; they never get there."

"I think you will find, Miss Anderby, that I have got there this time," said M'Whizzle, bowing. . . . "I was about to say, when I was interrupted, Mr Templeton, that you will find on the gateway of the stables, the fence of the stables, the stables themselves, and in yonder loft, certain marks which were useless to me without the further information now at my disposal, and which I do not purpose at present to reveal, finger-prints, to be exact, which have given me sufficient grounds to cause to be arrested on suspicion a very deep and cunning man, a man to blind whom it was necessary to take the utmost precautions, a man in your service and well-known to yourself."

"You don't mean to say——!" began the astonished merchant.

Lochinvar M'Whizzle looked at him compassionately, and nodded.

"I am very sorry to say I do."

"But who——?" began the merchant, utterly at a loss.

"When I tell you that the same guilty marks were discovered by me on the front door of the bungalow of your groom, Ryan——"

"Mr Ryan!" exclaimed Maud.

"You accuse my man Ryan of——?" exclaimed the merchant.

He stopped short. The anguished shouts that now broke in on them was enough to make him alarmed, irritated though he might be.

"Miss Ryan! Nellee! Miss Ryan!"

They heard the rush of footsteps and an adjacent stable door banged as the searcher sped on.

"Here!" cried Nelly, running forward. "Here!"

An agitated figure in an immaculate white suit burst in. All recognized it.

"Miss Ryan, dear-r lady!" Archibald cried, dashing forward and spreading his arms in despair and sorrow. "Oha!—*Susa*! *Susa*! Policemens have been to the bungalow and taken your father to jail."

The Chief of the Secret Police raised his head proudly.

"When I act," he explained, "I act silently and swiftly."

"And most entertainingly," added the old lady in a dry voice.

"You have made a serious error this time," burst out the merchant, with a glare which showed what he thought of the proceeding. "You will please release Ryan at once."

"I shall do no such thing," said Lochinvar M'Whizzle, disdainfully.

"But you have no evidence against him," expostulated Mr Templeton, red with anger.

"The finger-prints are conclusive," said the Chief of the Secret Police in a decisive voice.

"Finger-prints!" exploded Mr Templeton. "I said evidence."

"Perhaps you wouldn't mind telling us, Mr

M'Whizzle," suggested the old lady in placid tones, "what other evidence you have."

The Chief of the Police glanced at her undecidedly.

"The fact is——" he began, and stopped. . . . "I shall place my evidence before the Government in due course," he said with dignity.

"I thought so!" exclaimed Mrs Nixon, giving him a contemptuous look.

"It is a most tyrannous and unfriendly proceeding," cried Mr Templeton.

"You misunderstand, sir," said Lochinvar M'Whizzle, glancing at him sadly. "The action I have been compelled to take hurts me far more than you, but I hold the balance of justice in this city, and never shall it be said of me that I held it unfairly, even although my friendship with you has to suffer. . . . Miss Anderby," he continued, in a low tone, "I can never sufficiently thank you that at a recent interview, unmindful of your own interests, you did not hesitate to point out to me the path of duty."

"Oh, that's all right," said Maud.

"On the surface you take my decision lightly, but I know what your woman's heart tells you, and believe me, I reverence your sacrifice. Good-bye, Miss Anderby. Thank you again. . . . Good-bye, Mr Templeton!"

The merchant, beyond a fiery glance, vouchsafed no answer.

M'Whizzle gazed at him with an expression of mingled humility and indignation.

"Mr Templeton," he said after a moment, in a reproachful voice, "I am sorry we part thus. One day,

possibly in the police court, the scales will fall from your eyes. Then you will appreciate the character of a man who knows no other pleasure than his duty. Then you will murmur to yourself, as I murmur now, *Tout comprendre c'est tout pardonner.* Farewell."

With a melancholy bow, and a faint shrug of the shoulders, he disappeared through the doorway.

"What a man!" exclaimed Mrs Nixon, breaking the thunderstruck silence.

"I'll have nothing more to do with him till he releases Ryan," said Mr Templeton, firmly. "Nothing!"

"He has no evidence against Mr Ryan, on that point I will take as many bible oaths as may be deemed necessary, sir," said Archibald Podd, advancing. "All the evidence that he has got about anything don't amount to a row of safety pins, but he drives himself to extreme lengths with rage and disappointment, sir. He has even discharged me."

"But you discharged yourself," said Nelly in haste. "You told me so."

"Only after being ordered to leave at once," explained the young Eurasian. "I was tempted, Mr Templeton,to discharge myself at him, sorely tempted, Mister Templeton, I assure you; but I am a man of religious training, sir, so I held myself in and discharged myself through the doorway instead."

"Quite right, Mr Podd," said Maud.

"Yes, missie, better to be on the discharge sheet with a month's pay than on the charge sheet with a month's hard," said Archibald, wisely.

"This young man seems to be learning," muttered

Mr Templeton to Mrs Nixon, with a smile that showed that the storm in his mercantile bosom was subsiding.

"He's out of a job, poor fellow," pointed out the old lady. "Upon my word, I've a mind to give him one myself if only to spite our friend the Chief of the Secret Police. Only goodness knows what I should do with him."

"It would get your son disliked too," the merchant commented.

The opportunity had presented itself. Maud Anderby had not been looking for it, but she took it without any hesitation.

"He would be more useful to us than to you," she said in a low voice. "I hear he's simply wonderful with a horse."

"In that case, he would," agreed Mrs Nixon. Both looked expectantly at the merchant.

"Nelly," said Maud in a louder key, "this Mr Podd is a wonderful rider, isn't he?"

"I—I never saw anyone ride like him," said Nelly, after the very slightest hesitation.

"Father," said Maud, in a matter of fact tone, "we need another man in the stables badly, especially now there is this trouble about Mr Ryan."

Archibald stood trembling with excitement. A prospect full of wonderful possibilities had opened suddenly before him. Visions of himself riding gallantly to fame and fortune, himself first, the rest nowhere, flashed across his eyes. He longed to be instantly in action, to dart before Mr Templeton and explain fully what a suitable man he was for the job, and how hard he would try if given a chance. But

something told him that he was safe in the hands of Miss Anderby, the most beautiful young lady, except Nelly, that ever his eyes had rested on. He stood silent, his eager eyes on the ground, until he heard the words, "Well, would you like a job, Podd?"

Not until then did he begin to talk.

CHAPTER XVII

ANOTHER home came almost as easily as another job. Mrs Ryan at first misunderstood Archibald's offer to take the place of her unfortunate husband, and refused it. But when it was explained to her that with so many thieves about a man was needed as a protector of the household, the persuasion of his silver tongue, backed by a quite untrue remark of Nelly's to the effect that he had undertaken to do all the rough work, soon made her consent.

Life with the Ryans was a much more simple affair than it had been elsewhere. Mrs Ryan drew his wages and allowed him a dollar for presents, so but little arithmetic was required of him. He understood from her that he was saving money fast. This, in view of certain responsibilities he contemplated assuming, but which he had so far been too shy to mention to Nelly, was, he felt, as it should be.

He had been astonished when Nelly said he had undertaken to do the rough work; he was still more astonished when he discovered how much of it there was to do. Nevertheless he struggled manfully, stimulated by the encouraging remarks of mother and daughter. It was nice to be told that he was as steady as 'Old Time.' Who Time was he did not know, probably a former Chinese servant of theirs. That the man had grown old was not surprising if

he had to work as hard as he, Archibald, was doing.

But although his evenings were hard, if pleasant, the days at the stables passed easily. Nelly Ryan was not difficult to please, and after a week of strenuous cleaning and barrow-wheeling just to prove to him, it seemed, that she was mistress of the entire establishment, he found himself placed under the tuition of the most experienced stable-boy, to learn to be a jockey.

To go out with the string of horses almost before dawn, to watch from the grassy plain the sun rise like a big jewel out of the great smooth ocean, to inhale the comparatively crisp morning air, was a joy worth living for. At his age everything was worth living for; but now in daily contact with that strange creature, the horse, and those two even stranger and more loveable creatures, Nelly and her mother, he was as happy as a child at the Zoo.

In this new job of his he had already begun to exhibit signs of genius, and his progress was astonishing. They gave him an oldish, steady mare to experiment with for the first week. On his showing with that, promotion came rapidly. At the end of a month he had ridden every horse in the stable. Nelly herself, with Maud and Mr Templeton, came often to see him. So impressed was the old gentleman with the style in which he rode his first trial, that he gave him a five-dollar rise on the spot. In short, Ahasuerus Archibald Podd had become that happy being, the man who has discovered what he can do best in this world and is doing it.

In the Ryan's bungalow he grew even happier as time went on. The fact that the master of the house was still in jail did not depress him unduly. Indeed, he felt sometimes that the head groom would be rather in the way. He was ashamed of the feeling and did his best to curb it, taking every opportunity to express loudly his contempt for his old master, Lochinvar M'Whizzle, the oppressor of the poor. "Something would have to be done about it all," he said as often as necessary.

He said this for nearly the twentieth time after finishing a hearty breakfast one morning some two months after his arrival at the bungalow.

"Then why don't you do this something that you are always talking about?" asked Nelly, sharply.

"Me?" said Archibald, looking up from putting on his white canvas shoes.

"You are always saying what you'd do to Mr M'Whizzle. How you'd tear him to pieces and boil him alive," Nelly reminded him.

"I always said 'if I had my way,'" pointed out Archibald, defensively.

"He doesn't care a bit how long my husband is in prison," declared Mrs Ryan. "He sits there laughing and eating. And the more he laughs the more he eats, and up go the household expenses. Why don't you get up and do something, Mr Gentleman from Borneo, instead of taking my trouble so very easily?"

"What can I do?"

"Lots of things," cried Nelly.

He looked from the one to the other indignantly. Plainly there were conspirators abroad.

"I am doing my uttermost," he declared. "I am thinking of Mr Ryan in jail nearly all the time. It is a painful thought. But still I think it continually."

"Listen to him!" cried Mrs Ryan. "You knew my husband was at the police court again yesterday for the tenth time. You never asked what happened. That shows how much you think!"

"I—I did not want to obtrude myself into such a painful subject," explained Archibald in excuse. "Among the politest peoples the subject of having their husbands in the police court is seldom referred to. But my thoughts was with you and him. What did 'appen, missis?"

"Mr M'Whizzle asked for another remand. He said the evidence was not yet complete. The remand was granted."

"They won't let father out, Archibald," said Nelly, "till it's proved he did not steal the racehorse. I was talking to Miss Anderby yesterday. She says she thinks the spiteful Mr M'Whizzle will succeed in proving father stole the racehorse whether he did or whether he didn't. If it was a smaller thing than a racehorse he would have proved it already, there being plenty of peoples about who will swear anything. The only thing that keeps him back is the fact that the racehorse might turn up."

"If you were a man, Mr Podd," said Mrs Ryan, "you would make the racehorse turn up."

"But I am a man," said the young Eurasian, reddening.

"You!" said Mrs Ryan, contemptuously. "You're not!"

"In the opinion of the public I am a man," said Archibald, speaking with great firmness. "Really, Mrs Ryan, you seem to think I will believe anything you chose to say, even in the face of my trousers. But I am not gullible."

"Archibald is a man, right enough, mother," said Nelly, kindly. "He always takes a second helping at meal-times as though he had a right to it. You never find a woman doing that. Miss Anderby said to me yesterday, when we were talking in Old Joke's stall, that we might get your help, Archibald," she added.

"She mentioned my name?" asked the eager Archibald.

"She remarked also on how fat you were getting," Nelly told him, cruelly.

"Oah!" muttered Archibald, strongly disappointed.

"She wants you to go to-day and clean out the stall where her mongoose is, and take the mongoose cage down to Mr Templeton's bungalow," said Nelly, with a curious look. "She says that the exercise will do you good."

"But I shall get all dirty," objected Archibald.

In answer, Nelly Ryan took him firmly by the collar and led him all the way to the stable.

"Here's a broom now," she said in a hectoring voice. "Now go and make the place clean. You *are* getting fat—and lazy too. Suppose it does make you dirty? What is a man for then, but to do dirty work for we ladies?"

She sat on a bin outside the stable door and watched him sweep down the stall. It was indeed hot, dirty work, but under her terrible eye he went at it with

a will. The clouds of dust he raised made him cough incessantly. When he came into the open air again streams of perspiration ran down his begrimed face.

"Now we will move the mongoose and hutch out here," said Nelly, without giving him time for more than a breath or so of fresh air.

"I can do thatt—by myself," said Archibald. "Doan't come in, you will get dirty."

But for some reason or other, Nelly insisted on coming into the dusty stable.

"Now!" she cried, bending. Together they lifted the hutch and box.

"Oah, what dirt and dust!" she said quickly.

"It iss dirty, but I will soon end that," remarked the valiant Archibald, seizing the broom.

But the young lady held him back.

"Look at it," she said, gazing at the raised patch of dust with marked intentness. "Iss it not dirty? What a funny patch! As if a man had treaded there."

Archibald followed her gaze, noticed something, and stiffened like a dog at a rat hole.

"Miss Ryan," he said eagerly. "There is mysteries here. Do you observe the feet prints?"

"So—so there are," cried Nelly. "They must be those of the man that stole Old Joke. Fancy noticing them. You are clever, Archibald."

Archibald said he was, and, moreover, that when the police force lost his services they lost more than they thought they had, which, he said, some people had told him was not much. These marks were undoubtedly footprints, he said. The next thing to find out was how the intruder had managed to get his

feet under the hutch-box, closed in as it was on all sides, and make the footprints. Having said this he stood, his brow corrugated, painful in thought.

"It would have been easy enough to explain how he did it," ventured Nelly after a while, "if the hutch had not been there."

"I have it," cried Archibald at once. "Doan't you see, Miss Ryan, this fellow made the prints first, and then put the hutch on so that nobody should see them."

"How clever you are, Archibald," exclaimed Nelly, admiringly. "But what was he doing? Do you think he was peeping at Old Joke?"

"Yess, that is what he was doing," Archibald told her.

"He must have been a very short man, then, to have to stand on tiptoe," commented Nelly.

"He was a short man," decided Archibald. He had not noticed till then that the intruder, whoever he was, had been standing on tiptoe. But the deeper impression near the bunched toes showed that Nelly's surmise was correct.

"What big feet!" remarked Nelly, in an innocent voice. "Almost like a Kling's."

"Nelly," whispered Archibald, in sudden excitement, "the man that stole Old Joke was a Kling. We have here the big feet and the big toe turned in, and when that night of the robbery I poked my head into the hay-loft just before somebody hit it, I smelt coconut oil verree strong. Stronger than the Malay smells of it, but just like the smell of a Kling. Therefor I know that a Kling steals Old Joke."

The proof did not seem quite complete, but Nelly appeared satisfied. Archibald, very excited at his discovery of the foot-print and the conclusions he had drawn from it, suggested at once that he should lay the evidence before the Chief of the Secret Police and demand the immediate release of Mr Ryan.

But this was a course of procedure that Nelly would not hear of. They must keep this discovery to themselves, they two, she insisted. To this end she made the disappointed Archibald put the hutch over the foot-prints again.

"You're not going to tell anyone, then?" asked Archibald. "Not even Miss Anderby?"

"Miss Anderby——" began Nelly, and stopped. . . . "I was talking to Miss Anderby in this stable yesterday," she went on. "I think you are right, Archibald, when you say that a Kling has stolen Old Joke, for Miss Anderby told me that her father says that a big Kling merchant in Singapore betted a hundred thousand dollars that Old Joke would not even run in the Singapore Derby, even before the horse was stolen. Miss Anderby says, too, that Mr Templeton has betted much money that Old Joke will win this race, and that he is getting very anxious. Mr M'Whizzle says that he is certain that my father had a hand in stealing the horse."

"He is a pretty beast, this M'Whizzle," put in Archibald.

"So you see, Archibald," ended Nelly, "if you gave your proofs to Mr M'Whizzle you might do harm. For Mr M'Whizzle would rather do anything than be proved wrong."

"It seems to me, dear-r lady," remarked Archibald, "that I shall have to tackle the whole business single-handed. It's a funny language, is our British language, Miss Ryan," he added in passing, "when anybody has got to do a hard job by himself, using therefore both his hands, he says he is going to tackle it single-handed. Of course if I start looking for the thief again, I shall use all my hands and all my feet till I've landed the thief one by his heels and so stopped him from escaping."

"I hope you will, Archibald," said Nelly. "I shall think more of you than ever if you do."

"I hope you think of me as much as is possible already, dear-r lady," said Archibald. "However, I promise you that you will not find me wanting. . . . Except for one thing," he added gallantly, "which you'll always find me wanting."

"What's that?" asked Nelly, innocently.

"You!" he shouted, advancing.

"Go away, stupid," cried Nelly, flourishing the broom before him as she retreated from the stable.

A shade dampened by this unromantic reception of his first proposal, Podd finished his morning's work in silence.

He came home earlier than usual for tiffin, and afterwards proceeded to bathe and dress. In answer to Mrs Ryan's inquiries, he said that he had an engagement that afternoon to look for a criminal. From his dandified appearance as he left the house it looked as if he expected to find this person in a fashionable quarter. This was, in fact, his expectation. After another short visit to the stables, he spent the after-

noon in visiting hotel-bars in search of a short Kling with big feet who should look rich and wicked enough to have betted a hundred thousand dollars against, and successfully stolen, the Derby favourite.

But whether because the afternoon was a bad one or the thief was spending his money elsewhere, nothing in the shape of a small, rich-looking Kling presented itself. Archibald drifted further into unfamiliar Chinatown. He found himself in a street he recognized. Tram-cars ran along it, and one side was lined with shops.

He walked along, looking at the busy interiors incuriously. The afternoon had grown very hot and depressing. The crowd of natives on the pavement were not pleasant company. He resented the disrespectful way in which they jostled him, in spite of the fact that he wore a white suit and straw hat and, looked at from the back, might have been an important European.

There came a ruder shove than ever, almost flinging him into the gutter. A short, thick-set Kling, smooth-haired and with an elaborate chignon, huge gold earrings, and dirty white garments, flapped by him and ran into the road to board a passing tram. Archibald, looking after him indignantly, caught more than a glimpse of the huge white soles of the fellow's bare feet as they splashed through the mud. He ran a few paces in anger, and then, to the surprise and amusement of the spectators, stopped in the middle of the road and stood looking with deliberation at the mud.

Next he produced from a pocket and unfolded a large sheet of white paper and a three-foot rule. He

bent, and the spectators, crowding round, found him comparing the imprint on the mud with the figure sketch of a large foot. He pushed the crowd aside disdainfully, and after standing for some minutes deep in thought, boarded a passing tram-car.

It was over two hours later when a very footsore and dusty Archibald turned into a by-road, opened a white gate and entered the Government reserve. He took up the path that but a few weeks before he had ridden along with Nelly. He came more quickly than he had anticipated—although a path, he knew, seemed always longer on the first traversing—to the ditch where he and Nelly had halted on that memorable day, and went down and examined the bank. Yes, the footprints he had noticed then were still there, and to them were added other and fresher ones. It seemed to him, in fact, knowing as he did the habits of forest folk, that this was a place where somebody was in the custom of coming daily to draw water. And the footprints left by that somebody were exactly similar to those left in the mud by the Kling that jostled him, and by the intruder in the Templeton's stable!

Archibald scrambled up the bank. His expression now was that of a very much less civilized, but keener and brainier man. He was bending and examining the ground. Suddenly he set off quickly, like a hound that had hit the scent. You could see him in the thickest of trees, stopping, darting, taking cover always, with the craft of a savage. Generations of Dyak blood were helping him now. Later, at a sound which no European ear would have detected, he hid

himself completely in a clump of high grass. The earringed Kling that strode along in the sunlight a little later, with a pair of empty water-cans slung on a pannier across his shoulders, did not even dream that anyone was watching him, that was clear.

Archibald gave him plenty of time before darting from his patch of grass. Now he fled like a hare, scarcely troubling about the trail, but still noiseless, still taking advantage of all cover. The last thicket ended abruptly in a small clearing, in the midst of which stood a square hut, roughly built of reeds. After a wary look round, Archibald darted across the intervening space and crouched against the wall.

He put his hands together and forced apart the reeds. He looked in. There inside stood very quietly a horse of a chestnut colour, a horse which, now he saw it, he recognized at once.

A couple of hours later Alec Nixon, going home from a hard day's tennis at the Templeton's, in celebration of the first day of a month's leave, turned a corner of the road and at once saw walking rapidly in his direction a small very important figure in a white suit. A suspicion that he knew this figure turned to certainty as it drew nearer.

"'Evening, Podd," said Nixon.

"Good evening, dear-r lady—sir, I mean," said the figure, raising its hat with a sweep. It passed on almost at a run.

"Mr Podd," cried Nixon, turning on his heel; and then, as Archibald reluctantly came back a pace: "Why all this hurry?—What's your news? You have some news, I can see that."

The young Eurasian nodded. His rolling eyes and wide smile informed Nixon that the news was of a pleasant nature.

"It's private news, sir," he said.

"Private to you and Mr M'Whizzle?" laughed Nixon, aware of Podd's tender point.

"Mr M'Whizzle is the last person who will obtain the news from me," said Archibald, firmly.

"Ah?" said Nixon, in an inquiring tone.

Podd hesitated.

"I'm under sealed orders, sir," he explained. "My lips have been sealed by two ladies. They told me that if I discovered the missing horse I was not to tell anybody, and," he added with dignity, "I'm not going to."

"They said that?"

"They did, sir."

"Then I agree with them thoroughly," said Nixon, with an excited gleam in his eyes. "If you had told me, Podd, I should not invite you to my bungalow, but as you haven't, I do so now. You look hot and thirsty, Podd! You have the look of a man I knew who died before they could bring him a whisky and soda! Come!"

CHAPTER XVIII

None were more surprised than the Ryans that Archibald did not return home that evening, except perhaps the missing youth himself. Maud Anderby saw Nelly the next day, and said that Mrs Nixon had rung up and asked that Archibald should be allowed to accompany her son on a hunting expedition, and that Mr Templeton had granted permission. How long Archibald was likely to be away Nelly could not find out; but it seemed just as queer to her mistress as it did to her that he had taken no clothes with him, and had disappeared—without even saying farewell.

She expected confidently to hear from him soon; her mother, who since Mr Ryan's imprisonment had developed a cheery tendency to believe that every cloud had a silver lining, said she would probably hear from him within the next few hours, for a short sojourn in the jungle made most men think of home. But, as time went by and no letter came, she began to grow resentful, and absolutely declined to believe in her mother's theory that a cut finger on Archibald's writing hand was the cause of his seeming negligence.

It had been decided between Maud Anderby and herself that Podd should be selected for riding the second horse, Sambal, in the Derby. The horse had not the slightest chance of winning, and Mr Temple-

ton, grown permanently gloomy nowadays over the loss of the favourite, did not seem to care who rode him.

The prospects of her father being released grew steadily worse, it seemed to Nelly. She had never imagined that a man could be detained so many weeks without being brought to trial. It showed how great was the influence the Chief of the Secret Police possessed. True, the suspect was treated with the utmost consideration, and seemed contented with his lot. But when a man sits on the veranda of his prison quarters and calmly tells his wife that he is more comfortable there than in his own bungalow, it is clearly high time for him to be released; and both mother and daughter were anxiously awaiting the lifting of the great cloud that had come upon their home-life.

As Mrs Ryan often said, when a married man takes to bachelor ways there is no hope for him.

The absence of both father and Archibald gave Nelly plenty to do at the stables, and as the time of the race drew near, as often as not she was in the saddle at dawn superintending the final touches to Sambal.

On a hot morning two days before the race she had come home a shade jaded, and was now, after breakfast, reviving her spirits by hanging the laundry out to dry. Her mother had gone down to the jail with a basket of delicacies calculated to create a longing for home in the bosom of the most hardened married man. Light clouds were flitting over the hot, bright heavens. A fine breeze, blowing in from the sea, made working pleasant. In its strong embrace the white clothes billowed and flapped cheerfully.

A hen, clucking loudly, left a corner where, with the casualness of the oriental dorking, it had deposited an egg in full view of the general public. A dozen hens ran towards the egg on eating bent. And Nelly ran too.

"Good morning," said a well-known voice, as she stood erect wiping the egg on her apron.

"Archibald!" exclaimed Nelly, in an eager voice. "I mean, Mr Podd," she added as, after a preliminary scraping and kicking, a grinning face surmounted by a brand new solar topee slowly appeared above the fence.

"You are a great stranger," said Nelly in a coldish voice.

"Home again, you see, like the prodigious calf," grinned Archibald, uneasily.

"You might have written."

"I can't explain while hanging to this fence," said Archibald. "I was about to stroll in singing 'Home, Sweet Home,' and take my acucstomed place by the fireside, if one was needed in the equatorial regions, but your expressions on your face are very discouraging, Miss Ryan. If you will pardon me, I am not a great stranger. In fact, as a stranger I am only about a month old."

His arms growing tired, he dropped out of sight. Nelly heard him muttering to himself on the other side of the fence.

She unbolted the gate.

"Come in, then, little stranger," she said, good-naturedly.

The young man made his entrance with dignity.

Everything about him was brand new, the leather-bound, military topee, the high-collared, white duck suit, the bright yellow boots. Even his teeth had a Regent Street window look about them.

"Dear-r-r lady, how ar-r-e you," he inquired, holding out a hand. "Excuse my gloves," he added.

"I don't know what there is to excuse about them, Archibald," remarked Nelly, looking at the hand. "They seem to me good lemon kid. You must have paid a fortune for them."

"I only said that because that's what a gentleman always says to a lady," Archibald confided to her, smiling. "I read it often in stories of the affections. But I suppose in England the loving male is always a poor and therefore his gloves have holes in them and must be excused. Now, I am no longer a poor!"

"You're looking well," said Nelly, quickly.

"And you also," he smiled, with an admiring glance.

"I ought not to be," she protested, "with all my hard work, and father away and you away."

"Did you miss me much?" queried Archibald, tenderly, standing on one leg.

"We missed the cat more," Nelly replied. "She got chewed up by a dog the same night as you left. We wondered if the dog had chewed you up too. But Miss Anderby told us next day that you'd gone hunting. Where was you hunting, Archibald?"

"Oh, yes, we was hunting!" said the young man, evading the question. He twirled his ebony cane. . . . "And we've been rowing and sailing and swimming and ri—we've had a jolly fine old times, I can assure you."

"Why didn't you write?" demanded Nelly, naturally indignant that the person she imagined tramping through the jungle after rhino had been living this life of pleasure.

"Mrs Nixon made me promise I wouldn't," replied Archibald, after slight hesitation.

"I didn't know she was there."

"Oah, yess," said Archibald. "We've been on Mrs Nixon's nephew's rubber estate on the Dutch coast opposite Singapore. We went on his launch."

"What made you go in such a hurry?" asked the mystified Nelly. "If you knew you were going, surely you could have told me."

"I promised Mrs Nixon I wouldn't," said Archibald, looking down and tapping his boot with the ebony walking-stick.

"Very well, Mr Podd," said Nelly in an offended voice. "If Mrs Nixon is more to you than I—me and mother are, good-bye then."

She turned, and began to walk quickly towards the bungalow.

"Oah, Miss Nelly," cried Archibald, following her, his arms outstretched imploringly.

"Don't you address me as Miss Nelly, you treacherous boy," she called out, turning her head. She walked through the garden door and slammed it in his face.

It was as if the door had actually hit his face, so miserable was his expression. He stood for a minute staring at the painted barrier of planks with pained eyes.

The latch moved. The door opened a few inches. An offended face peeped out.

"Doan't you call me Miss Nelly again, Archibald," said the girl, even more sharply.

"I won't, I won't, I assure you, Miss—Miss Ryan."

"And I won't be called Miss Ryan either, Archibald," snapped the maiden. Archibald stared at her.

"You won't be called Miss Nelly, and you won't be called Miss Ryan," he muttered, mystified. "Then what the dickens must I call you?"

"Don't you know, you stupid fellow?" she cried, blushing and giving him a glance that in an instant turned him to fire. "Oah——"

She ran up on to the veranda.

But if ever Archibald broke a speed record it was on that morning. He was on the veranda as soon as she.

"I shall call you Nelly," he said, hoarse with joy. "I shall always call you Nelly. Oah, what a lucky, lucky man I am!"

"But you must not think, Archibald," said the young lady with composure a few minutes later from the armchair in which Archibald was sitting, "that I have promised to marry you because I like you. Oh, noa! That is not soa!"

"Not so, Nelly?" exclaimed Archibald in slight alarm from the armchair in which Nelly was reclining.

"You see, husbands are not allowed in Christian countries to keep secrets from their wives."

"Hum—Nelly," muttered Archibald, looking a shade discomposed.

"Now," said Nelly, putting her head in the centre of his immaculately-clad chest. . . . "Oh, I am com-

fortable. . . . And I am ready to hear all about where you have been."

"After we are married, Nelly dear," he cooed. "Perhaps in six months' time."

The young lady sat up instantly and, with an angry motion, freed herself from his arms.

"But I have sweared a great oath," protested Archibald. "And Mrs Nixon who I sweared it to is down at Mr Templeton's bungalow now waiting for me. She also put me on my honour as a gentleman that I would never reveal anything——"

Miss Ryan rose to her feet.

"—Of what," said Archibald, hastily, "I am going to reveal to you if you will swear on your honour as a perfect lady that you won't tell her I told you it."

"You stupid dear," murmured Miss Ryan, sinking back into the many-armed armchair.

Mrs Nixon might have had to wait at the Templeton's bungalow for Archibald (who had promised to be absent only five minutes) had not the arrival of Lochinvar M'Whizzle within a quarter of an hour of her own caused her visit to be prolonged.

The Chief of the Secret Police, who was disguised as a Bombay constable, arrived in great good humour, and, as ever, was glad to get through his business in public.

"I have not forgotten our talk, Miss Anderby," he murmured, bowing over her hand so low that she was nearly putting up the other hand to hold his helmet on. "Your words have ennobled and purified me."

Maud said shortly that she was pleased to hear it.

"I have ceased to think of you as a mere woman," said Lochinvar, ardently, allowing his brilliant black eyes to dwell on her face. "To me now you are a star. I am climbing towards you, climbing every day. You draw closer. I begin to detect your lineaments. I look forward to the day when I shall shine beside you, a twin star."

Maud nodded coolly. She positively hated him now for his treatment of Ryan.

"It is a long time to look forward to," he suggested, mistaking apparently the reason for her silence.

"The longer the better," said Maud, bluntly.

Lochinvar M'Whizzle drew himself up and looked at her in offended amazement.

"You are prejudiced against me because in Ryan's instance I insist on doing my duty," he said in a reproachful voice. "Very well. . . . Mr Templeton," he said loudly, walking across the drawing-room. "And . . . Mrs Templeton."

"Please don't leave me out, Mr M'Whizzle," said the old lady.

"And, of course, Mrs Nixon," added M'Whizzle, with the slightest of sneers.—"Although really the matter does not concern you. . . . I called in passing, Mr Templeton, because I knew you would be interested in my news. Your racehorse Old—Old Joke is no more."

"But the matter does concern me," said the old lady, calmly. "I put a thousand dollars on him yesterday."

"You what?" exclaimed the merchant in astonish-

ment. "How foolish to run the risk! As though we don't stand to lose enough."

"Mr M'Whizzle was confident he would recover the horse," said Mrs Nixon. "And my belief in Mr M'Whizzle's almost supernatural abilities is childlike."

"My dear Mrs Nixon!" said the Chief of the Secret Police, delightedly. "But you must not expect us to do everything," he added, shaking a playful forefinger. "Here is an instance. We have discovered your horse, or all of it there was to discover, but, sadly enough, what we did discover was in the stomach of a crocodile."

"You don't mean to say," exclaimed Mrs Nixon, "that you marvellous detectives know what is going on in the stomachs of the crocodiles!"

"Well, hardly that," smiled Lochinvar M'Whizzle. "But——"

"I shall have to call him in to me sometimes after dinner," said Mr Templeton.

"You'll have the Singapore Medical Association after you if you do," returned the old lady.

"I was about to say," said the Chief of the Secret Police, in freezing tones, "when you were good enough to interrupt with your doubtless very amusing comments, that a large crocodile was caught last night in the River Taub, only two miles from where we are now, and that in its stomach was found—this."

Amid an interested silence, he opened the despatch case he was carrying and produced a large horse-shoe.

"Only that?" asked Mrs Nixon, after a short silence.

"That was all connected with this case," said

M'Whizzle. "We found, however, clues connected with other cases on which we are engaged."

"No nails?"

"There was a bit of partly-digested nail, I believe, but a careless constable lost it."

"All the rest of the horse gone?" asked Mrs Nixon, in a dismal voice.

"All gone."

"Poor fellow!" said Mrs Nixon, tearfully. "Poor Old Joke!"

"The horse was evidently being led across the ford on the night of the robbery," explained the Chief of the Secret Police, "and the brute seized it and pulled it into deep water. I had the local police up before me, and, after severe cross-questioning, got them to admit that they saw a yellow horse being led across the ford by a short white man, whom I had no difficulty in recognizing from their description as Ryan."

"Ryan must have been indigestible, like the horse-shoe," commented Mrs Nixon.

Lochinvar M'Whizzle frowned at her majestically. "I have other evidence against Ryan," he said, "and he knows it. He is trying to throw me off the scent too. Only to-day I received information that he has backed this deceased horse, Old Joke, through an intermediary for a very large sum. And I understand that my late clerk, Podd, has also been putting money on the horse. Probably he, too, wants to throw me off the scent. But, as usual with the criminal classes, these men have over-reached themselves. Their action has merely had the effect of increasing my suspicions."

"You'll have to arrest all Singapore soon," com-

mented Mrs Nixon, "and where you'll find jails enough I don't know."

"Do you know what I think of your horse-shoe tale, sir?" asked the merchant, explosively.

"George! George!" said Mrs Templeton in a soothing voice.

"I think it's tommy rot, sir!" said her husband.

"Very well," said Lochinvar M'Whizzle in an icy tone. "I have done my duty. My conscience is clear. I had intended, sir, to present you with this horse-shoe as a memento of the occasion, but I no longer have that intention. Instead, I lay it at the feet of a lady whose soul, sir, is on a plane sufficiently high to call to mine. . . . Miss Anderby," he continued, with a graceful gesture, "accept from me this trophy of the chase in memory of that ennobling conversation we had together."

Laying the horse-shoe on a foot-stool at Maud's feet, he rapidly left the apartment.

Mrs Templeton, in some indignation, got a small pair of tongs and, picking up the horse-shoe, dropped it gingerly through a window on to a flower-bed. She said she did not mind what Maud thought, but nothing would induce her to have in her drawing-room anything that had been in a crocodile's stomach. Throughout her life, she said, she had striven to preserve an elegant tone, and not even for Maud's sake would she cease her efforts.

"I think I shall have it nailed on Old Joke's stable door," said Maud, laughing.

"You don't believe it was his?" gasped the merchant.

"She does," observed Mrs Nixon. "Didn't you notice the tears? Poor Mr M'Whizzle!"

"I think he must be going mad," said Maud, in some concern.

"You've got some secret understanding with him," said Mrs Nixon, accusingly. "I know it."

"I hope not," said Mrs Templeton. "I sincerely hope not."

"Only when I'm on my astral plane, mother," Maud assured her.

"These very brilliant men are sometimes rather unsound," commented the merchant. "I wonder if there's anything in what he thinks about Ryan."

"Father!" cried Maud. "You've known Ryan for years."

"But still," said Mr Templeton. "Racing, you know! I didn't like what he said about Ryan putting money on. I wish I could take mine off," he added, sighing.

"Don't do anything of the kind," said the old lady, earnestly. "And whatever you do, Mr Templeton, don't be tempted to scratch the horse. I don't pretend to be a prophetess, and I seldom have presentiments. Perhaps it may be that lately I have had slight neuralgia, but something inside me keeps on saying that Old Joke is going to run, and more than that, is going to win."

"Thank you for being so encouraging," said the merchant with a melancholy smile. "Of course I hope you are right, but the chance of his being found seems slight now."

"Do look after your neuralgia," urged Mrs Temple-

ton. "In this climate it is dangerous and, if it causes sleeplessness, may give rise to something mental. I suppose you have not had much sleeplessness?"

"None," said the old lady, shortly. "Dear me, we've been talking so much, and Mr M'Whizzle was so entertaining that I'd really forgotten what I'd come for. Ah, yes. . . . We are having a very pleasant time on my nephew's estate, and we are all coming in for the races. Then we are going back for a week or two, and I do so want Maud to come over with us. It'll be a change, and the bathing is beautiful. I'm sure you would enjoy it, Maud."

"I should love to."

"Of course she will be glad to go," said Mr Templeton, heartily.

"You can wear your old things over there and enjoy life," her mother pointed out. "Not too old though; there will be a lot of planters about. I don't care for planters much, but, after all——"

"They're going to have a race dance," said Mrs Nixon, getting up. "I see my cavalier on the drive."

"It's Podd, isn't it?" said Mr Templeton, peering.

"Yes, young Mr Podd of Borneo," said Mrs Nixon. "Doesn't he look impatient and—isn't he a swell?"

CHAPTER XIX

In that curious mosaic known as Singapore, which sits on the equator complacently as a watch-chain locket on a portly man, all nationalities the year through go their several ways. Each nationality at the proper season holds its national festival, of which all the other nationalities are tolerant and amused spectators. No European, for instance, can look at a number of solemn Chinese attempting to imitate a dragon trying to swallow the sun in the procession at Chinese New Year without experiencing a slight tendency to smile. And the Chinaman who sees an Englishman hit on the elbow by a fast bowler receives the information that cricket is an enjoyable game with something more than a suspicion of mirth.

But all races and creeds are alike in their appreciation of a good horse, and on Derby Day there is not usually much doing in the business quarters of Singapore.

At three o'clock on the day of that memorable Derby, as one cannot see the wood for the trees, so the Race Course, because of the crowds on it, was nearly invisible. They surged everywhere over the large grass plain in the hot sunshine, meeting and mingling, brilliant as a kaleidoscope, men and women of nearly every race the Orient holds, gesticulating, smiling, quarrelling, smoking, chewing; sucking

oranges, sucking pineapples, sucking melons. The perspiration rolled off one and all, the cheerful noise gladdened the whole island, and where the crowd was thickest arose, yes, even a faint cloud of steam.

Motor cars and charabancs, luxurious bullock waggons, carriages and pairs more glittering than anything Hyde Park sees lined parts of the course. Some were open and full of staid Chinese women and their solemn-faced children. From chinks in the closed silk curtains of others, languishing eyes looked out, there was a gleam of gold ornaments, a glimpse of rounded yellow arms, delicate taper hands, with henna-stained finger nails. Gaudily-attired Malays, suspicious and truculent-looking, threw fierce glances at any passer-by who dared to show too much inquisitiveness about what exactly the contents of these curtained equipages were.

The demeanour of those in the enclosure was a shade quieter than usual that day. Nobody knew, in fact, exactly where he was. Old Joke had for months been a hot favourite for the race, with the Rajah of Tidatau's filly a bad second. And then a month or two before the day, the favourite for some reason or other had receded to 33 to 1. And even at that price there had been a syndicate of Klings openly willing to lay thousands against him.

The Rajah's filly was said to be lame, and had gone back to third place, and the favourite now was Bohong, a big Australian bay owned by a *kongsi* of Chinese merchants, who were still putting their money on at 3 to 1, stolidly disregarding the thousand rumours that were flying about the ring. For some

reason or other a lot of money had been quietly put on Old Joke during the past week. It had been done with very great judgment, but as at the same time the Kling syndicate had been refusing to lay any more against him and were known to be trying to balance their book, the price hardened, and now stood at 10 to 1.

The news that the horse had been stolen had, of course, reached the town, but not too much attention had been paid to it in well-informed racing circles. The Chief of the Secret Police had a general reputation for diabolical cleverness, and it was felt that such a well-advertised theft was merely a cunning move on his part with a view to the bringing of other criminals to justice. Old stagers placed their faith entirely on Mr Templeton; and as he had invariably put off all inquiries and had never even suggested scratching the horse, they had kept their money where it was.

On the grand stand itself the atmosphere had attained a solemnity befitting the presence of the Governor, a man who was well known to positively favour the total abolition of all gambling, betting, drinking, opium smoking, and horse racing, and who, every one knew, only attended race meetings under compulsion of his well-marked sense of duty. Most people here felt that too much gladness on such an occasion would show disrespect for the State, and restrained themselves accordingly. But the Nixons and Templetons had seats in a far-away corner, where a certain amount of decorous mirth might be permitted.

Not that Mr Templeton looked inclined to laugh.

Those who noticed him, and they were many, were alarmed at the expression on his face. At 2.45 he looked so miserable that Old Joke went back a point in the odds. The merchant had, in fact, been inclined not to come at all, and except that a certain pride and a disinclination to run away when beaten, together with the knowledge that his wife had a new lavender frock she wanted to exhibit, had held him, the Singapore Derby would have been without his presence for the first time in twenty-five years. But witnessing the race was all he felt equal to, and he had left the care of Sambal to Nelly, with Alec Nixon as his representative.

At ten minutes to three, the white-haired, monocled Race Club Secretary, on that day a more important man that the Governor himself, came along, shook hands, and paid Mrs Templeton's frock a delicate compliment. Mr Templeton grew more cheerful. At five minutes to three, Mrs Nixon unobtrusively took her seat. The bell rang for the course to be cleared for the race of the day.

"How is Sambal?" asked Mrs Nixon.

The merchant shook his head.

"She won't do any good," he replied. "I saw her at exercise a couple of days ago. She wasn't moving at all well."

"I've backed her for a place," said Mrs Nixon.

"You'll lose your money, I'm afraid."

"You deserve to, I think," said Mrs Templeton. "You're plunging."

"With my neuralgia anyone would plunge," said Mrs Nixon, calmly. "It makes me, as I told you, into

a sort of prophet. I saw Sambal in a dream last night. She came in second. The jockey was very small and almost black."

"You're right in that," Maud said. "Father decided two days ago to let Ahmat ride her."

"That disposes of the second place," remarked Mrs Templeton, maliciously. "Perhaps you can tell us which horse will be first?"

"Ah," replied Mrs Nixon, slowly. "I've backed Old Joke, as you know; but perhaps I am foolish.... There seems to be trouble over there," she added, nodding.

The course was now very nearly clear. A row of Sikh policemen in khaki and turbans were walking down it. Chinamen scavengers appeared, picking up paper and banana skins. The crowd were retiring in an orderly manner behind the rails. A small queerly-dressed native leading a camel was declining to follow them, so it seemed. He was insisting, as his gesticulations told the onlookers, on being allowed to pass the line of police and walk alone up the course. His demeanour was one of oriental dignity. Nevertheless he showed signs of excitement as he talked to a pair of towering Sikh policemen. To those in the stand his attitude seemed almost magisterial.

A stout man in a grey helmet, sitting in the front row in a line with the Templetons, suddenly stood up and looked hard at the group on the now almost empty course through a pair of field glasses.

"That's my camel that was stolen a fortnight ago!" he said loudly. "I'm certain of it."

He climbed laboriously over the railing and ran

across the course.

"The Head of the Botanical Gardens, a most excitable man," whispered Mrs Templeton.

"But he's not so excited as the policemen," said Maud. "Look at them beating the camel driver. They'll kill him."

"The brutes!" observed Mrs Templeton. "But they've stopped now. They seem ashamed of themselves. Look! They're leading the camel away. They've hurt the little man. See how he limps."

"It's Mr M'Whizzle," said Maud, suddenly. "I thought I knew him. Oh, isn't he ridiculous!"

The well-known Chief of the Secret Police, stopping for a moment to gravely salaam to the Governor, limped towards the grand stand on the arm of the solicitous Head of the Botanical Gardens, and stood leaning against the rail within a yard of the Templetons, panting heavily. The grand stand buzzed with excitement.

"Well, of all the men!" muttered Mrs Nixon.

"I'm certain it's my camel," the Head of the Botanical Gardens could be overheard saying. "It was stolen a fortnight ago or—er—longer."

"But, my dear man," M'Whizzle told him, with a supercilious laugh, "I've had it months. Ah! . . . How do you do!"

His roving eyes had fallen on Mrs Templeton. He salaamed deeply. "Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings, my good botanical friend," he said to the stout man. "This lady will corroborate what I say about the camel. Haven't I had the animal months, Mrs Templeton?"

"Certainly you've had it a long time," replied the lady.

The excited and mystified Head of the Botanical Gardens, after saying he would have the matter looked into, jumped the rails and resumed his seat.

Lochinvar M'Whizzle, with a meaning glance at Maud, shrugged his shoulders expressively.

"I had to come up here to get further evidence about—er—the death of your recent loss," he said to Mr Templeton. "I will not mention names in public."

The listening spectators tried to put on a disinterested air.

"You witnessed my treatment at the hands of a brutal constabulary?"

Mrs Templeton nodded, sympathetically.

"But why did you drag in the camel?" asked Mrs Nixon.

M'Whizzle looked at her with the air of a man who has just noticed the presence of a black beetle. "My good Mrs Nixon," he drawled, "after all, I am not an inhumane man. Camels want fresh air like other animals. A run in the afternoon does one's pet camel all the good in the world, just as it does one of your dogs. I was taking my camel out for a run."

"In your opinion our recent loss, Old Joke, is dead, I suppose?" asked Mrs Nixon, bluntly.

"Hush," said Lochinvar, holding up a warning hand. "No names please."

"I'll bet you an even pony," said the incorrigible old lady in a low voice, "that Old Joke is not dead."

The Chief of the Secret Police disdained reply, and

allowed his amused glance to travel over the grand stand.

But all eyes were now fixed on the course, where the runners were already filing out for the canter past. The Rajah's filly led off, going very freely and looking well. No hint of lameness there! Next came Bidusta, the third favourite, a small delicate roan, whose handling by his jockey came in for adverse comment. The big bay owned by the Chinese *kongsi* was very well liked. Sambal passed in dead silence. And then from the paddock there suddenly came the sound of cheering, deepening very quickly into an excited roar.

Twenty yards behind the last entrant, sweeping grandly down the course, there cantered into view a magnificent chestnut, a horse obviously in a different class from those which had gone before.

"Now, Mr M'Whizzle, before it's too late," chaffed the old lady. "Only a pony! Just an even pony!"

"Old Joke!" muttered a hundred voices. "Old Joke!"

"Good Lord!" ejaculated Mr Templeton, his eyes starting. "How's he got here? I never knew——!"

He half rose in his seat, his race-glasses glued to his eyes.

"Who is that on him?" he demanded. "I don't seem to know him."

"Podd, of course," said Mrs Nixon. "Your best jockey. Mr Podd of Borneo."

The big chestnut was opposite the stand. As he cantered by, the jockey, his yellow jacket swelling in the breeze, turned and gave those on the stand a

broad grin. Moving magnificently, Old Joke swept down to the post.

"But I can't understand it," gasped the merchant. "I feel as if I'd been played with. . . . You didn't know anything about it, did you?" he demanded.

Maud and her mother shook their heads with emphasis.

"It's Mr M'Whizzle's doing! He discovered him, and brought him here along with the camel. But he's too modest to say so," declared Mrs Nixon.

The Chief of the Secret Police gave her an angry stare.

"Never mind how Old Joke got here," said the old lady, all excitement. "Let's look at him win the race. Can you see, Mr M'Whizzle? Come and stand here by me. I want you to notice most particularly how a horse just escaped from the stomach of a crocodile can run. . . . Ah! They're off well!"

A muffled roar came from the distance. The race had begun, and from the beginning it was clear that there was only one horse in it. Archibald and an outsider got away first. Old Joke was going at a great pace with a clear lead from Bohong, Sambal was third, and the Rajah's filly last. At seven furlongs Sambal had given way to Bidusta, the Rajah's filly had crept up to fourth place, and Old Joke was a clear twenty lengths ahead.

Mrs Nixon put down her glasses.

"It's a procession," she remarked, triumphantly. "I knew it would be. Maud, where are your glasses? You haven't any? Take mine, then."

"Thank you," said Maud, gratefully. "He is riding

well," she remarked after a moment. . . . "I only hope he isn't taking it too easily. He is sitting up in the saddle."

"What!" exclaimed the old lady. "The fool! Let me look, Maud."

She took the glasses. A sudden roar came from the crowd further down the course.

"Old Joke has stumbled," said the merchant, excitedly. "There was a man out on the course, running at him and waving."

"It's a Kling," cried Mrs Nixon. "Those Klings are determined to prevent him winning. Foul play if ever there was! What are your men doing, Mr M'Whizzle? Oh, you police!"

"He's down!" almost shouted Mr Templeton. "Podd's badly thrown. . . . No, he isn't, he's up. . . . They've pulled the Kling off the course. . . . Podd's got Old Joke up. . . . Good work, Podd! By Jove, he's mounted . . ."

"I never saw anyone mount like that," said Mrs Nixon.

"Is he on?" asked Maud, anxiously.

"On, yes, of course he is," said Mrs Nixon, "and going strong, too. . . . He vaulted on Old Joke like a trick rider. Put his whip between his teeth and never worried about the stirrups. . . . He'll win yet!"

"He can't," said Mr Templeton. "He's about five lengths behind."

"I agree with you," said Lochinvar, looking not ill-pleased. "It's—er—in sporting parlance, 5 to 1 against him winning."

"He'll win," said the old lady. "I'm willing to do

business with Mr M'Whizzle on that basis, 5 to 1 in thousands of dollars. Come, now, you're a sporting man!"

"I never bet, madam," said the Chief of the Secret Police, curtly.

Maud took her excited eyes off the horses for an instant, and glanced at Mrs Nixon. The old lady, rather pale, was standing erect without the sign of a tremor. Her air was confident enough to give anyone courage.

"Never say die," Maud heard her mutter, as, her eyes glued to her glasses, she followed the distant tiny figures. "He has made up two lengths, and Bohong's tiring. Bidusta's creeping up now."

Maud saw the small bright shapes coming round the turn. It seemed to her that Archibald was riding magnificently. He was now not more than three lengths behind Bidusta, and had already drawn level with the Rajah's filly, who was being tailed off rapidly. Could he still have a chance? It looked to her as if he could. And evidently the crowd were beginning to think as she did, for the low, half-disappointed murmur was swelling into a more hopeful roar. Bohong had now dropped behind Bidusta. Sambal, going strongly, was drawing level. What a task for Old Joke! It seemed almost hopeless!... But he was creeping up.... Maud's heart was going like a hammer. She wanted Old Joke to win more than anything in the world. And so she knew did three-quarters of the people on the course. And he was creeping up.... The crowd saw it! The roar deepened. On the grand stand somebody shouted

"Bidusta." A dozen voices roared back, "Not he!"

They were coming at a rare pace down the straight. The yellow jacket had drawn level with Bohong. Old Joke did not falter. He was running straight as an arrow, and more than that, he ran as if he knew how much depended on his winning. Podd seemed to be getting every ounce out of his mount. He had not yet used his whip. A minute later he began to do so. He was making his effort——And succeeding too!

The horses came on, closer, closer. Maud heard the roaring of the crowd, the pounding of the hoofs as the horses flashed by. She caught a close glimpse of Archibald's gleaming excited face and the gallant Old Joke's outstretched head and wide open nostrils. He was second, only a neck behind the leader Bidusta. Would he manage it?

"Bidusta! Bidusta!' came a shout from the stands. And then a delighted roar, it seemed to Maud from everywhere. "Old Joke! Old Joke!"

"He's done it," she heard Mrs Nixon say, in a tone of relief.

A dozen assailed Mr Templeton with outstretched hands.... She felt herself pushed out on to the course, one of a surging crowd whose centre was Old Joke and Archibald Podd. There was her father leading the horse in, there were Nelly and Nixon shaking hands, and presently she was shaking hands too—with the joyous Archibald. And then came a vision of the triumphant jockey being embraced by Nelly, Nelly's mother, and an eager multitude of delightful

dark-eyed girls, understood to be relations of the Ryan family.

She was whirled into the paddock with the rest. . . . She remembered a most triumphant luncheon, a delighted Alec sitting next to her, the popping of many corks. . . .

CHAPTER XX

THE rubber estate people were giving their ball, and half Singapore was in attendance. It had come in launches that now lay at anchor off the wharf while their owners danced on the manager's big veranda; and not a man or woman among the guests complained of mosquitoes.

From the seat in the garden on which Maud and Alec Nixon sat, the sound of the string band playing a two-step came, but not too loudly. The lamps of the bright veranda threw a broad beam of light on the path beside them, across which flitted grotesque shadows of dancing figures. A full moon cast a silver drugget over the quiet strip of water that lay between them and twinkling Singapore.

"But I've told you how it happened so often before," complained Alec.

"Never by moonlight! Besides, I want to hear about it again. It sounds so very wonderful. To think that, unknown to us all, you managed things so well, and have made us all so desperately well off."

"You must thank Podd for that—Good Podd, dear-r lady!"

"Mr Podd of Borneo!"

"Well, if he had not come from Borneo, I don't

suppose we should ever have found Old Joke. The fellow's got a scent like a greyhound. He took me down to the reserve at night and, dark as it was, he led me through the woods straight as an arrow. How he did it I don't know. Apparently he has some method of marking the trees, used by the Borneo Dyaks. He hid me behind some bushes, and crawled up to the hut himself—I shall have to take you to see that hut some day. You'd never dream that any place could be so well hidden."

"I'm dying to see it!" Maud murmured.

"Well, after a while, Podd came back. You can't hear him move in the woods. He goes over the ground like a Red Indian in moccassins. There were two bottles of square-face in the hut, so he reported, and beside each lay a greasy Kling, dead to the world."

"What, asleep?"

"Yes, the sleep of intoxication," laughed Alec.

"Of course that made everything simple," he went on. "By Jove, if they ever try and bring 'prohibition' into vogue in Singapore, they'll have to do it over my dead body after this. . . . Well, we just walked in, led away Old Joke, and marched him through side streets down to the wharf. Not many people were about, it was late by that time. So we did not attract attention. We walked Old Joke aboard my cousin's launch, and locked him in the saloon. And next morning, bright and early, as is my custom, off we all went to the estate, where, as you know, my cousin and I put Podd through his facings every day, and licked him into shape. He did not take much licking.

He'll be another Fred Archer, if he likes to keep in training, will that fellow!"

"So you and Archibald Podd simply walked down to the hut in the reserve, found the Kling guard dead —asleep, marched Old Joke on board, and brought him over here?"

"Yes," said Alec. "Nothing very heroic."

"Who wants to be heroic? I'm tired of heroes," said Maud. "They're too strenuous for this hot country."

"Lochinvar M'Whizzle has certainly knocked himself up," remarked Alec. "The doctor says he'll have to take things more quietly. M'Whizzle will go slower in future. See if he doesn't."

"Poor Mr M'Whizzle. I am sorry. Though I'm glad the Governor censured him for what he did to Ryan. And Archibald Podd? There's another hero. What do you prophesy for him?"

"He," said Nixon, "will marry Nelly Ryan as quickly as possible, and settle down and get as fat as butter. They all do, these Eurasians."

"Sensible men!"

"I wish somebody would help me to settle down," murmured Alec, plaintively.

"Mrs Nixon has already."

"She shakes me up!—Isn't she wonderful?"

"I think she's absolutely loveable," said Maud. "There's nobody like her, no one!"

"She thinks the same about you, and so do—all her relations."

"Oh! . . . I'm glad."

"She thinks you ought to settle down. . . . And so

do I," said Alec. An unaccustomed earnestness in his tone did not escape her. . . .

She felt his arm round her. . . . When he spoke again, her reply came very low——And she settled down.

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